Multigrade schools in context: literacy in the community, the home and the school in the Peruvian Amazon

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ABSTRACT

This study explores literacy practices among the Peruvian rural population in the Amazon, and the relationships of these with literacy practices in the multigrade school. The conceptual framework for the study draws on a perspective of literacy as a social practice whereby literacy is seen as a highly contextualised practice, related to the uses that different social groups have for it, and shaped by history, culture and power relationships that permeate each group.

The study therefore focuses not only on the multigrade school but also on literacy practices in different domains in the life of rural children: the community, the home and the multigrade school. Through an ethnographic approach, the case study examines rural children's immediate environment, and the meanings and uses that literacy has for their communities and families. These values and expectations of literacy are not confined to the local context but examined in relation to regional and national contexts and to the particularities of Peruvian society and history. The arrival of literacy within the colonial enterprise in XVI century, the limited access to literacy for rural population, the progressive expansion of schooling during XX century and the current uses of literacy are examined as aspects of the historical and current context that shape what literacy means today for rural populations.

In order to explore the practical possibilities to improve literacy learning in school, an action research-based intervention was conducted with teachers in the case study school. It demonstrates the possibilities and also the constraints for improving literacy learning and for using action research as an instrument for fostering teachers' professional development.

The research findings indicate a complex relationship between literacy practices in different domains, including the multigrade school. They also demonstrate the social character of literacy practices and their embeddedness in power structures, social relations and identities. While there are clear discontinuities between domains, there are also coincidences and continuities across domains that have implications for literacy learning in the multigrade school.

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"The rural area lacks functional uses of writing, a factor that hinders literacy learning among children"

Godenzzi, Flores and Ramirez, 2000

The quotation above reflects a widely held view in Peru, as in other developing countries (Maddox, 2001), that rural areas lack literacy and this in turn is an obstacle for learning. There is, however, little research about actual uses of literacy in Peruvian rural villages to support this statement. Indeed, as this study will show, uses of literacy in rural villages usually remain invisible to schools and educators. Rural villagers are frequently judged by what they do not do with literacy, rather than what they do. This study takes a different starting point: it looks at the uses of literacy in a rural village in the Peruvian Amazon, focusing on three domains in the life of rural children: community, home and multigrade school. The study therefore aims to make visible the varied, contrasting and even strikingly similar ways literacy is used in each of these domains and the complex relationships among them.

The study also addresses another "invisible" situation: the multigrade school[1]. This kind of school has a long history, even longer than that of the much better known monograde school (Little, 1995; Pratt, 1986)[2]. Multigrade schools are found all over the world, in developing and more developed countries (Little, 1995). Nevertheless, despite their long history and widespread presence, multigrade schools tend to remain invisible in educational policy, curriculum planning and educational research.

This study, however, acknowledges the particular characteristics of multigrade schools. It aims to contribute to a broader concern about how to improve literacy learning in multigrade schools. To do this, the multigrade school is not studied in isolation, but is situated in the particular context in which it operates. Different dimensions of this context are addressed through the study: national, regional, local and institutional. Particular emphasis is given to the local context in relation to literacy. The study argues that through the

[1] Multigrade schools are those in which the teacher teaches two or more grades at the same time in the same classroom.
[2] In which one teacher teaches only one grade group.

exploration of the actual uses of literacy in different domains, it is possible to provide an understanding of the social and educational context that surrounds and shapes literacy learning among rural children. This in turn allows the development of a more fruitful approach and strategies for enhancing literacy learning in multigrade schools.

1. Rationale of the study

Literacy constitutes a great concern for educators, policy planners and researchers all over the world. Raising levels of literacy among populations has become a common target for most governments, and over the past one hundred and fifty years the school has become the main place for trying to achieve this goal. In the past few decades, however, many governments have found that it has failed to do so.

This is the case of Peru, a South American country in which students from public schools achieve at a level of only 49.7% in reading and writing (Díaz, 1998).[3] Such low levels of achievement led to an examination of the school system, which showed lower school efficiency in rural areas:

> "The extremely high levels of inequality that mark national life are reflected in rural schools (...) in rural schools the highest indicators of school inefficiency and the lowest levels of learning are concentrated. Here we found the highest repetition, dropout, partial or total absenteeism and over-age rates." (MED, 2002)

Indeed, rates of promotion to the next grade are lower in rural areas (85.4%) than in urban areas (93.6%). Repetition and dropout rates in rural areas (14.6% and 11.4% respectively) are more than twice those of urban areas (6.4% and 4.8%). The gap between rural and urban areas is one of the most significant gaps in the Peruvian educational system (MED, 2001).

Different explanations have attributed this situation to lack of funding for schools, lack of materials, poor quality teacher training and teacher-centred pedagogy (Pozzi Scott and Zorrilla, 1994; Montero et al, 2001; Godenzzi,

[3] Results from the first national examination conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1996.

Flores and Ramirez, 2000). Nevertheless, recent changes in some of these aspects do not appear to have led to better results. Efforts to provide educational materials and improve physical conditions during the last 6 years are still far from solving the problem (and far from reaching all schools). Many educational materials remain unused by teachers (Ames, 2001). Improvement of infrastructure, although important, does not necessarily lead to better-quality teaching. A new pedagogical model introduced in 1996, characterised by a pupil-centred approach, is still far from being adopted by all teachers.

Although all these facts could and do influence educational outcomes, it seems that a perspective centred exclusively on schools and technical aspects of literacy acquisition is not enough to explain the complexity of the problem. A detailed understanding of the role and functions of literacy outside the school and the aspirations and values that sustain it is also necessary (Scribner and Cole, 1981).

Nevertheless, when educators and researchers address the social context that surrounds schooling, it is usually in negative terms. There is a questionable assumption that cultural and linguistic diversity is a problem: here it is argued that this is the context not the problem. The problem lies in the lack of attention that this diversity receives in educational practice at various levels (see for example Montoya, 1990; Walton, 1993). The rural context is characterised as deprived with regard to literacy (Godenzzi, Flores and Ramírez, 2000). Thus, a great part of the population, i.e. rural people, have been represented as deprived of literacy or simply illiterate. Studies in other societies, however, have shown that in many cases, despite such a characterisation, there is a variety of literacy practices among these people (Street, 2001; Kalman, 1998; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996).

This study considers the need to understand literacy within its own social, cultural, historical and political context and through people's practices (Barton, 1994; Lund, 1997; Street, 1995; Verhoeven, 1994). This perspective is a fundamental part of the approach developed by proponents of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993), which considers literacy not as a simple, neutral and technical matter — as it has been seen traditionally — but as a social and

ideological practice implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1995).

Indeed, looking at Peruvian history, one can see how literacy has been connected with power relationships in a society in which dominant groups have traditionally monopolised the written word. From the beginning of colonial rule (1532), literacy was part of the symbolic repertoire of the conquerors. As Degregori points out, reflecting on the initial contact between the Spaniards and the indigenous population: "since the very beginning of our history, Spanish language, reading and writing were perceived by the Andean population as a privileged instrument of domination and deception" (1991:13). Besides literacy, schooling has also played a central role in the ways in which subordinate groups have related to dominant society in Peru (Lund, 1997; Ansión, 1989; Nugent, 1996; Montoya, 1990) and other Latin American countries (Archer and Costello, 1990).

Historically excluded from schools, in the 20th century these groups (composed mainly of indigenous and non indigenous rural population) were compelled to attend school under the ideology of integration into national society (Contreras, 1996). The integration and modernisation carried out by the State implied the "civilisation" of traditional, rural groups, transforming cultural and regional identities into a national, urban, western-oriented identity (Montoya, 1990). This effort met with a great deal of resistance from local powers and complex reactions from peasants: from resistance and mistrust to a warm welcome and later the emergence of popular and social movements that struggled for their right to education (Ames, 2002; Degregori, 1991).

In this long process, literacy and schooling for rural people became associated with specific values and expectations related to possibilities for social mobility, defence of their own rights and the exercising of citizenship (Ames, 2002). Literacy is not only associated with these values, it is also embedded in power and social relationships that have shaped and shape the acquisition, spread and use of literacy.

Although social research in Peru has paid attention to the relation between literacy and schooling in terms of cultural and power issues, educational

researchers and policy planners still know very little about cultural and social practices and the meanings that literacy holds for different groups in the rural population today. Even less is known about how they relate (or do not relate) to practices promoted in school.

From this brief account, however, it is evident that the context of literacy acquisition in Peruvian society is neither neutral nor simple and it should be taken in account in efforts to improve educational quality.

This study offers an understanding of the social meanings of literacy within a specific context. It is concerned with social and educational aspects surrounding children's literacy experience. To this end, the first research question addresses how literacy practices differ among different domains in the life of rural children (community, home and school). This involves a close examination of the uses, functions and values associated with literacy in each domain.

The study also addresses the particularities of multigrade schools and situates multigrade teaching in its social context, seeking improvement of children's literacy learning. The second research question is, therefore, how can a perspective of literacy as a social practice contribute to making literacy learning more meaningful and effective in multigrade classrooms.[4] It is argued that this approach could pave the way for improved literacy learning in multigrade schools.

Indeed, the conceptual framework chosen for this study has theoretical and practical implications for multigrade teaching. This study employs the New Literacy Studies approach, which challenges the conception of literacy as a technical skill that can be learned through a series of graded steps. The technical aspect of literacy is part of a broader conception that sees literacy as a social practice. This perspective can also be related to new pedagogical approaches that emphasise the importance of meaning and social context rather than only codification skills in literacy learning. From both perspectives, the traditional graded division inside schools (the monograde model as the

[4] See Appendix 1 for an outline of research questions and a table with sub-questions for each domain.

predominant way of organising instruction), which has been seen as the ideal by most educational systems, could be rethought and compared with other learning experiences outside school. The study then proposes a social and educational approach to the study of literacy and multigrade schools as a way to contribute to the understanding of both and the improvement of literacy learning in the latter. The reasons for choosing to study a multigrade teaching context are related to its widespread presence in rural areas, as explained below.

2. Literacy and Multigrade schools

The multigrade educational situation is particularly important in the Peruvian context. There are currently 23,419 multigrade schools in Peru. They represent 73% of public primary schools in the country. In Peruvian rural areas, 90% of schools are multigrade. The vast majority — 70.6% — of rural students are educated in multigrade schools (Montero et al, 2002). Therefore it is through multigrade schools that rural groups have access to formal literacy learning.

Despite their widespread presence, multigrade schools and their particular needs are almost invisible in educational research, administration, policy and planning. Teachers are not trained in multigrade methodology, and they receive inadequate support for teaching in terms of educational materials, teaching aids, and even furniture and buildings. It is not surprising, then, that multigrade schools in rural areas show lower levels of efficiency.

Despite its importance in the Peruvian school system, multigrade teaching is not unique to Peru. Although the monograde model of schooling had become the ideal by the late 19th and 20th centuries, multigrade teaching was, and currently is, widespread around the world (Little, 1995). Recently, multigrade schools have become especially important in reaching the goal of universal access to education in sparsely populated areas. Nevertheless, multigrade schools have tended to be seen in developing countries as an inferior solution, necessary because of geographic, demographic and material difficulties (Thomas and Shaw, 1992).

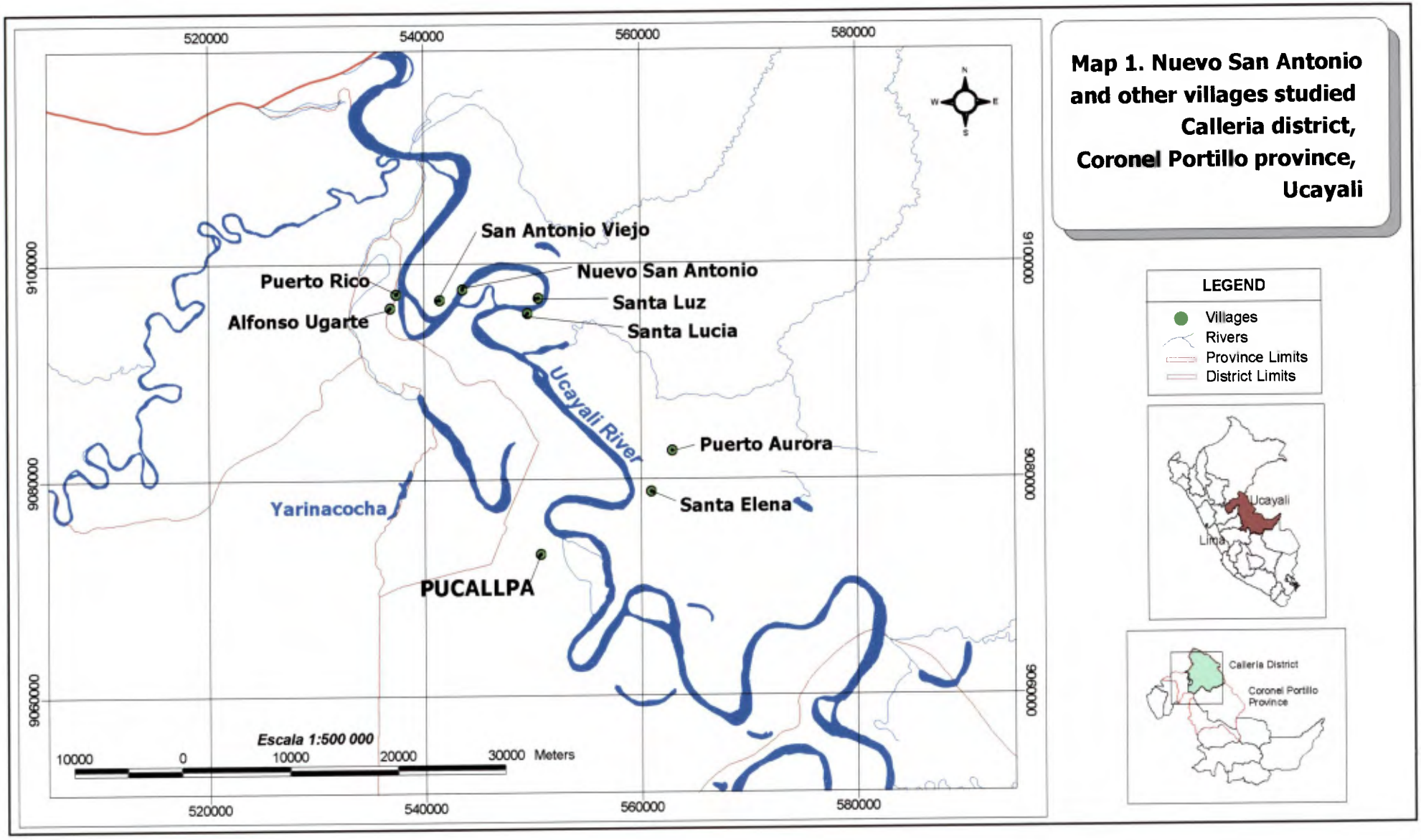
This is also true in Peru, where multigrade schools are considered inferior to and are associated with poorer educational outcomes than monograde schools. The solution that parents and teachers seek is to get (or move to) a monograde school. For most, however, this alternative is far from being achieved for several reasons: dispersion of the population, the small size of each village, the small number of students and the State's limited resources for providing more teachers and infrastructure. In addition, moving to another (larger) town which has a monograde school involves costs that most rural families cannot afford (Montero et al. 2001).

Despite the widespread belief that multigrade schools are inferior, however, research on multigrade schools in other countries suggests that there is little or no difference in students' achievement in multigrade and monograde classrooms (Veenman, 1995, 1996; Miller, 1991, 1991a, 1990; Psacharopoulos et al, 1992; McEwan, 1998; Pratt, 1986). Multigrade classrooms can be as effective as monograde classrooms, or even better in some aspects (i.e. students' affective development), if adequate training and resources are allocated. But because developing countries tend to retain single-grade pedagogical methods in multigrade situations, they fail to reap the potential benefits (Thomas and Shaw, 1992). More attention is needed, therefore, to understand and improve learning in multigrade schools, taking in account their particular characteristics and the context in which they operate.

3. An ethnographic study in the Amazon

Four hours downriver from Pucallpa by public boat is San Antonio, a small village on the right bank of the Ucayali River in Peru's Central Amazon (see map 1)[5]. The 50 families who live there are mainly dedicated to fishing and agriculture in the tropical rain forest. The inhabitants are *mestizos*, "mixed-race people", descendants of an indigenous population that has mixed with outsiders over the years. The village has a multigrade school with three teachers, providing all six years of primary education.

[5] The official name of the village is Nuevo San Antonio, as shown in the map. However, I will use the abbreviated name of San Antonio as it is more often used by inhabitants.



Map 1. Nuevo San Antonio and other villages studied Calleria district, Coronel Portillo province, Ucayali

LEGEND

- Villages
- Rivers
- Province Limits
- District Limits

I conducted an ethnographic study and an action research project in San Antonio between August 2000 and November 2001, living there for six months. The ethnographic study allowed me to use a variety of fieldwork methods to observe and understand the uses and meanings of everyday literacy practices in the village and relate them to different aspects of village life. I carried out a census of all families in the village; formal and informal interviews with parents, teachers, children, and local representatives; repeated visits to selected families; classroom observations; and participant observation of daily life and special events in the village. I participated in communal assemblies, masses and parents' assemblies; in civic, religious, sports and school festivals; in family festivities and daily events. Occasionally, when a teacher was absent, I also taught. I collected children's texts, spontaneously produced or requested, as well as school notebooks and other texts present in village life.

In this way, I gathered different types of evidence that gave me a better understanding of the role of literacy in the domains of school, community and home. The action research project conducted with teachers explored the educational possibilities for improving literacy learning in multigrade classrooms and provided rich information about teachers' literacy practices and ways of fostering educational innovation.

The findings of this study draw upon this carefully collected corpus of data. Although it is not possible to generalise all conclusions based on a single case, San Antonio shares common features with other rural villages and multigrade schools. In this sense, the study might reflect what happens in similar situations and contribute to our understanding of the meanings and practices associated with literacy in rural villages.

Thus, this study aims to contribute in several ways to social and educational research. Besides developing barely explored fields such as literacy practices in Peruvian rural villages and multigrade teaching, the study also aims to contribute to the field of international and comparative education, since multigrade schools are found all over the world, mainly attending rural populations. A growing body of knowledge produced by studies in different

countries has been helpful in analysing more critically what literacy is, what literacy learning implies and how multigrade schools can enhance children's education in remote areas. This work aims to contribute to this broader discussion through a detailed study of how a multigrade school operates and how children's community and home experiences play a role in their literacy learning.

4. The structure of the study

The study is organised into three parts. The first part presents the conceptual framework that orients the study (Chapter 1) and the research methods used (Chapter 2). It also provides an overview of the current educational context in Peru (Chapter 3), a context of change and transition that introduces new possibilities for teaching and learning in Peruvian schools. I discuss how these possibilities are useful for the improvement of learning in multigrade schools, as well as constraints in fully exploiting these possibilities. This chapter provides a broader institutional framework within which to understand current practices at the San Antonio school and how the need to address other contexts, such as home and community, is particularly relevant in this educational context.

The second part analyses literacy practices in the three domains chosen: school, home and community. Chapter 4 addresses community literacy practices, first introducing the place of literacy throughout Peruvian history, then presenting the particularities of the regional context, and finally exploring the current uses, values and meanings that literacy has for rural villagers in San Antonio, situating them in a broader (national, regional) framework. Chapter 5 is dedicated to home environment of San Antonio's children, examining the uses of literacy within the family and how children approach the written world. Ways of learning at home are also explored in this chapter, revealing particular features that are contrasted with ways of learning at school. Chapter 6 describes literacy practices in San Antonio's multigrade school, exploring teaching and learning strategies, multigrade classroom management and teachers' backgrounds and conceptions about literacy, learning and multigrade classrooms. Teachers' own literacy practices are also

explored in relation to their literacy instruction strategies. Chapter 7 analyses the process of working together with teachers under an action research approach to improve literacy learning in multigrade classrooms. This process revealed the potentials and limits of such an approach for enhancing teachers' professional development and in-service training.

The third and final part of the study brings together the three domains in order to identify differences between them as well as the similarities which link them (Chapter 8). This chapter then analyses the complex relationships across domains and how the active ways in which different actors engage in literacy practices are influenced by their participation in other domains and larger institutional forces. Finally, the conclusions (Chapter 9) present the main findings and their implications for the study of literacy and its teaching and learning in multigrade schools.

5. Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the people of San Antonio, and especially to the children, who shared with me their time, their joy and their intense sense of life. It has been impossible for me to capture all this intensity in the pages that follow, that only offer a partial view of the richness of their lives. I hope this study can contribute in some way to improve the education they get and bring it closer to their hopes and expectations.

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CHAPTER 1:

LITERACY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that orients the study. It is grounded in a theoretical perspective known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Street, 1993), which considers literacy as a social and ideological practice, implicated in power relationships and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1995). This perspective does not deny technical skills or cognitive aspects of literacy, but understands them as encapsulated within cultural wholes and power structures.

The debate in the field of literacy studies that has led to the conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice is presented in the first section. Although this perspective is widely present in the field of social studies (Brandt and Clinton, forthcoming), a view of literacy as a neutral skill and autonomous "thing" still remains dominant in much educational work (Street, 1995).

To understand this dominance, the second section examines different literacy learning paradigms and the views of literacy that underlie them. This shows the emergence of a trend in which the view of social context as a central factor in literacy learning is gaining considerable ground.

The final discussion brings together perspectives from NLS and literacy learning studies. It discusses how they complement each other and how an approach that draws on both has theoretical and practical implications for the study of literacy learning in multigrade schools.

1. The debate around literacy

In the introduction, I have already pointed out that literacy is a main concern in national and international agendas. In most of the world, particularly the developing world, literacy is considered to be associated with modernization, development and wealth. Raising literacy levels, it is believed, will develop individual and social capacities, which in turn will allow economic growth and development in any given society (Anderson and Bowman, 1966).

Literacy's supposed consequences for the individual and society, however, have been debated over the past several decades. While some authors have argued about the universal consequences that literacy produces in human societies, others call for placing literacy within its own context and examining what people do with it in order to understand different situations around the world that apparently call into question such universal effects. Moreover, without denying the right of every person to acquire literacy, and the benefits people can get from it, it must be noted that the dominant discourse on the importance of literacy usually considers illiteracy as a cause, rather than a consequence, of the unequal distribution of wealth and power in the developing world (Street, 1995). Illiteracy, then, is constructed as a main explanation for backwardness and poverty, especially among subordinate groups, obscuring other social, economic and political factors. How to understand literacy (and its effects), therefore, has been widely debated.

1.1.The great divide theory and the autonomous model

The defenders of the first position (the universal consequences of literacy) come from such fields as anthropology (Goody and Watt, 1968; Goody, 1977), linguistics (Ong, 1982) and psychology (Olson, 1998a, 1998b). This theoretical position, usually referred to in the literature as the "Great Divide" theory, led to a general point of view in which literacy was seen as transforming the mind and society, and its acquisition was considered a central factor for intellectual, linguistic and social development (Olson, 1998b).

From this perspective, literacy represents a difference between human cultures and their ways of thinking (Havelock, 1963; Goody and Watt, 1968), since it was considered to make possible the growth of knowledge with the development of logic and categories of understanding, the distinction between myth and history, space and time, and allowed a shift toward the objectification of the individual (Goody and Watt, 1968). Written communication appears associated with logic and ideational functions, whilst orality appears more embedded in contextual relations (Ong, 1982). Changes produced by literacy are associated with psychological changes, with the alteration of ways of representation and consciousness (Olson, 1998a). Thus,

the evolution towards a literate tradition implies a new way of classifying and organizing knowledge (Olson, 1998a; Goody and Watt, 1968). Literacy was furthermore associated with the beginning of political forms of organization, such as democracy (Goody and Watt, 1968).

When scholars of the great divide theory faced some of the limits of this theoretical approach, they laboured to overcome them. Using the concept of "restricted literacy," Goody (1968) tried to explain why the reception of literacy in societies in Asia, Africa and the Pacific had not produced the same social and cultural effects that it had in classical Greece. According to this concept, various social factors restrict full achievement of literacy's potentialities. Nevertheless, the original idea (that literacy in itself produces changes in thinking and social organization) is maintained. Similarly, Ong (1982) uses the concept of "residual orality" to explain why some characteristics of oral culture are still present in literate societies.

Orality and literacy consequently have been interpreted as opposite poles, and sets of features exclusive to each have been established. Literacy has been related to ways of thinking, cognitive abilities, facility in logic, abstraction and higher-order mental operations. As Street (1995:21) remarks, the corollary of such an approach is that illiterate people are assumed to lack these qualities, to be able to think less abstractly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon the nature of the language they use or the sources of their political oppression. At the social level, therefore, literacy is considered necessary for social progress, modernization, industrialization and participation in the world economic order (see Wagner, 1995).

The perspective emerging from these studies is what Street (1984, 1993) calls the "autonomous" model of literacy, which emphasises technical aspects of literacy independent of the social context. It considers literacy as a set of technical skills and universal cognition that may be learnt independently of specific contexts or cultural frameworks. It therefore implies that what literacy will necessarily achieve on its own is the same in all times and places (Street, 1995:75).

This set of ideas has had a powerful impact on education. One example serves to clarify the ways in which this view of literacy has affected educational issues. A look at Peruvian school textbooks shows that illiteracy is presented as a "social problem" at the same level as poverty, unemployment, sickness, malnutrition, and crime. Illiteracy is defined as a situation that prevents development; literacy, therefore, is seen as an agent of development.

> "Illiteracy is the situation of people who do not know how to read and write because they could not go to school. This implies backwardness in cultural life, because the illiterate person contributes little to local and national development"[6]

This quotation from a third-grade textbook synthesises a widespread belief about literacy and illiterate people and the way the issue is presented in schools. The illiterate person is considered a non-useful citizen who does not contribute to social development and economic progress. In social terms, therefore, the lack of literacy implies backwardness, underdevelopment and poverty. Moreover, literacy is associated only with school, and other ways of acquiring literacy (non-formal learning) are clearly absent. Surely this was not the aim of theorists arguing for the social and cognitive consequences of literacy. Nevertheless, these ideas are hard to contest from this theoretical perspective.

1.2. New approaches to the study of literacy

Several authors (Scribner and Cole, 1981; Verhoeven, 1994; Street, 1995; Lund, 1997) have pointed out that there is no empirical evidence for a universal or standard "literacy" that predisposes literate individuals to produce independent thinking. Moreover, increasing ethnographic evidence prompted the need for a different theoretical perspective. Olson (1998b), summarising critiques against the great divide, points out that further anthropological and linguistic studies have shown that many of the characteristics attributed to literate individuals were indeed present among members of non-literate societies. Moreover, non-western but literate societies did not necessarily

[6] From a third grade book presented for contest to the Ministry of Education in 2002, page 73 (data of publisher was not available due to conditions of contest).

present ways of thinking and speech associated with modernity. Nor were systematic differences found between lexical, syntactic or discourse structures of literate and oral production. Finally, while the logic processes of different cultures were not necessarily different, they departed from different premises.

Indeed, the assumed cognitive and social consequences of literacy, the strong dichotomy between literacy and orality and the role of context with regard to literacy had been contested through cross-cultural and ethnographic studies. This process led to a new theoretical approach known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS), developed in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Regarding the cognitive consequences of literacy, the findings of the study conducted by Scribner and Cole (1981) among the Vai of Liberia called into question central assumptions of the great divide theory. The study did not find that non-literate people in general achieve lower levels of performance than literate people. In studying different types of literacy, the researchers found that what had been considered "high order mental skills", taxonomic skills and syllogistic reasoning were not a consequence of literacy itself. Each type of literacy was associated with a particular set of skills developed through particular practices. The empirical evidence, therefore, showed that there were not universal cognitive skills resulting from literacy itself, but particular skills related to different uses and kinds of literacy and the context in which they were learned and practised.

While the study by Scribner and Cole, grounded in the field of psychology, called into question the autonomous model and its central statement that literacy would have cognitive effects beyond its context, the work of Graff (1979, 1987a, 1987b) did the same in terms of the social consequences of literacy. Working with historical evidence, Graff had uncovered some of the "myths" that attribute to literacy an impact on social progress and economic development. By examining the case of Sweden, he showed how economic development does not follow from the spread of literacy, since nearly the entire population was literate by the 17th century, but levels of poverty and inequality remain the same long after that. Similarly, examining the

educational qualifications of factory workers in 19th-century Canada, Graff showed how literacy had little independent effect in altering the workers' employment and income. Besides literacy, other factors, such as ethnicity and age, played a part in explaining differences among workers (Graff, 1987b).

Ethnographic work by Heath (1983) has also contested the dichotomy between orality and literacy that lies at the heart of the great divide theory. Analysing the uses of literacy and orality in three US communities, Heath provided evidence of the ways in which each community's uses of orality and literacy differ, the interplay between orality and literacy, and how people develop skills according to the ways they use orality and literacy. This study recognises a much more complex interplay between the two (see also Lund, 1997; Boyarin, 1993). Other authors had also stressed that differences between orality and literacy appear more dependent on the context of use than on the intrinsic characteristics of each type of communication (Gee, 1986; Kulick and Stroud, 1993; Street, 1995).

The centrality of the context of use of literacy that arises from these studies is related not only to communicative practices but also to the wider social context in which they are produced. Instead of a single type of consequence produced by literacy in societies, ethnographic evidence has shown that there are varied and diverse uses of literacy that are intertwined with cultural traditions, social and historical processes and power structures (Kulick and Stroud, 1993; Bloch, 1993; Street, 1984, 1993, 2000; Fishman, 1991; Lund, 1997).

Based on this profuse body of ethnographic evidence, Street (1984, 1993, 1995) proposed an alternative theoretical framework, the "ideological model," in which literacy varies according to the context and situation. Literacy practices are considered to be inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society. In the same vein, the ecological metaphor that Barton (1994) suggests defines an integrated view of literacy as a social, historical and psychological phenomenon. Both authors point out the need to study the social contexts in which literacy events are produced and practices

played out, including the ways in which different institutions support particular forms of literacy.

This theoretical approach, then, criticises the assumed consequences of literacy and the great divide between literate and illiterate people and societies. The emphasis of research shifts towards an understanding of what people do with literacy (and why), rather than what literacy does to people.

A set of critical issues about the study of literacy emerges from these studies. First, there is concern about continuity rather than a divide between orality and literacy (see for example Lund, 1997; Boyarin, 1993). Second, they question the still-prevalent notion that societies progress along a universal sequence from orality to literacy (Boyarin, 1993: Street, 1995). Third, they emphasise the existence of multiple literacies rather than a single literacy. These are associated with different domains of social life and embedded in the uses and functions that people give to written communication (Barton, 1994; Street, 1995). Finally, they state the need to understand every literacy in its own context (social, cultural, historical and political) and through people's practices of literacy.

The theoretical framework that the NLS is developing places much more importance on the context in which literacy is used. Rather than considering social factors as elements that could "restrict" the consequences of literacy, as Goody states (1968), literacy itself is considered a social practice shaped by historical, cultural and social processes and embedded in power structures. The very idea that literacy has universal consequences is rejected, because what literacy produces is not intrinsic to it, but depends on particular practices and the social contexts in which it is used.

This perspective has also had implications for educational practice. The importance of context in literacy learning has been increasingly recognised by educational theories (see section 2.2 below). It has also been shown that school literacy is culturally constructed and could differ from other uses of literacy among different social groups in different contexts. These differences could be useful in understanding school failure among children from different

cultural traditions, as well as in addressing the different resources they bring to the classroom, which can be useful for learning (see also Chapter 8).

The NLS approach has been particularly helpful for this study. Given the school system's failure to provide literacy for the rural population, it allows for a more integrated understanding of literacy in the social context in which it is used and learned. The study, therefore, is concerned not only with literacy teaching and learning at school, but also with literacy uses and practices among rural villagers. What literacy means for them, how these meanings are related to power structures and social relationships, how they differ in different domains of use and the implications of this for literacy learning at school are central questions of the study that this approach helps to address. In researching literacy as a social practice, I use the analytical tools developed by the NLS, which are presented below.

1.3. Analytical tools for the study of literacy

Some central concepts of the theoretical framework presented above have been used throughout the previous discussion. Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of some of these concepts used as analytical tools in this study. These concepts are *domains* of use of literacy, *literacy events* and *literacy practices*.

1.3.1. Domains

According to Barton (1991), the use of literacy may be different in different *domains* or social situations. Institutions such as the home, community, workplace or school may nurture particular definitions of literacy and associated literacy practices. To focus on these institutions as "domains" makes it possible to contrast different situations and identify particular literacy practices in each. Different institutions may support different or even conflicting literacy practices, but there is also overlap and movement between domains. Larger concerns might also influence across different domains. A particular domain could be defined sociologically (i.e. by reference to a distinct social situation) or by the fact that it involves identifiable types and uses of literacy.

In this study, the category of "domain" is useful in analysing the role and uses of literacy in the home, community and school and raising identifiable and particular uses of literacy in each (see chapters 4, 5 and 6). In this way, it is possible to identify similarities as well as differences that can help explain the possibilities and problems faced by literacy learning at school. These domains are also brought together to analyse the ways in which they overlap and/or interact (see chapter 8).

1.3.2. Literacy events and practices

In many of the studies presented above, the social activity of literacy is analysed using two basic concepts: literacy events and literacy practices. Literacy events refer to any occasion in everyday life in which the written word has a role (Barton, 1994:36); in a broader sense, literacy practices refer to the general cultural ways of using literacy on which people draw in a literacy event (ibid. 37)[7].

In comparing studies, the distinction sometimes becomes difficult because the origin and uses of these terms vary. In an attempt to clarify these concepts, Street (2000) explains that literacy events refer to observable events, such as reading a newspaper, checking a train timetable, writing a document, filling out a form, etc. He points out, however, that the mere observation of these events does not explain how the meanings surrounding each event have been constructed. The conventions and assumptions that underlie these events cannot be explained merely by the description of them.

Therein lies the importance of the concept of literacy practices. As Street explains, this concept "attempts to handle the events and patterns of activity around literacy, but to link them with something broader of a cultural or social kind" (2000:21). In each literacy event, social concepts and models regarding the nature of this activity are in play and provide meaning for it. Thus, it is necessary to link the experience of reading and writing with what people do and think. What gives meaning to literacy events may be something not

[7] Barton (1994) explains the roots of these terms: the first case is based on the idea of speech events used by socio-linguistics, while in the second case several disciplines had used the idea of social practices; literacy practices can be seen as social practices associated with the written word (36-7).

apparently linked with literacy in the first instance (Street, 2000: 21). Indeed, the concept of literacy practices is of analytical importance, because it can show that literacy is not only a set of functional skills, but also a set of social practices intertwined with such cultural and social issues as identity, social position, authority, etc. This concept is central to the understanding of literacy as social practice that characterises the NLS, because it provides a way of making sense of the different uses and meanings of literacy across different social contexts.

In this study, the concept of literacy events helps to identify different ways and situations in which the use of literacy can be observed. It allows insight into the presence and role of literacy among a population usually depicted as illiterate and makes it possible to move beyond school literacy as the only valid type of literacy. With the concept of literacy practices, it will be possible to link the practical uses of literacy with the cultural and social meanings and values it has for local people. In this sense, literacy can be understood as a social practice, not merely a technical skill. Given the educational focus of this study, the use of these concepts helps to identify local uses of literacy that could be used fruitfully in the classroom, as well as social aspects that help or prevent literacy learning in school. To address this second dimension of the study, the next section traces the educational approach that complements this NLS' social view of literacy.

2. Learning literacy

Just as the field of literacy studies has been marked by a shift towards the importance of context in understanding literacy, a similar process has occurred in the field of early literacy learning. Although the development of literacy learning theories and practices in the field of education have followed routes different from those of literacy studies, they seem to move in similar directions. This section discusses this similarity by presenting some of the main perspectives in early literacy learning (i.e. among young children) and the growing development of current trends that recognise and emphasise the social nature of the literacy learning process.

2.1. Perspectives in early literacy: from historical to current trends

The field of early literacy reflects different perspectives and approaches associated with its particular history. Bloch and Prinsloo (1999) point out that psychological and individualist models have dominated the orientation to reading and writing. In the past, they said, the way children come to literacy was shaped by constructions of child subjectivity by psychologists that focused upon individuals in isolation from their social location. This predominant universalist and essentialist point of view has been criticised on the basis of anthropological and sociological evidence. This criticism stresses the culturally variable dimensions of literacy in social practice.

Because of the dominant approach, the focus on literacy in schools has been on the skill dimensions of reading and writing. In the past few decades, however, there has been a shift in educational discourse from a skills-based approach towards a meaning-centred approach that is more socially reflexive. To understand this shift, Crawford (1995) offers a good typology of different educational paradigms of literacy learning, which show the impact of psychological and social explanations of literacy in education. Starting with theories that prevailed in the first half of the 20th century, Crawford shows the centrality of the concept of "reading readiness," embodied in the idea that children do not read until they are "ready." This readiness, however, was viewed in different ways. ***Maturational*** perspectives believed that young children needed time to mature and develop self-knowledge before beginning formal reading instruction. This maturation would occur as a result of biological process of neural ripening that could not be hurried. In contrast, ***developmentalist*** perspectives held that appropriate pre-reading experiences could hasten a child's readiness to read, while a lack of these experiences could inhibit readiness.

The main assumptions underlying the reading readiness theory assert that reading is a separate skill, a content area unto itself, that can be broken down into a series of isolated skills arranged in a skill hierarchy, and that reading is best learned through direct, systematic instruction — an objective, scientific, value-free process (Crawford, 1995:75). These assumptions demonstrate not

only the skill-centred approach that had been dominant in schools, but also the technical, isolated view of literacy outside the social and cultural context in which it occurs.

A shift towards an emphasis on meaning emerged in early literacy perspectives in the late 1960s and 1970s. ***Connectionist*** perspectives note the importance of meaning-centred learning and incorporate some useful pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, there is still a strong emphasis on direct teaching of the alphabetical code and word recognition, based on the belief that knowledge is built on the elements, pieces or components of our experiences and consists of learned relationships among them.

A very different approach is taken by ***emergent, social constructivist*** and ***critical*** perspectives, which emphasise the meaning-making aspects of reading and writing: children acquire literacy best through active engagement in meaningful, literacy-related activities rather than through direct, explicit teaching of reading skills. Literacy learning is seen as an ongoing, active process that begins before school. Connections and interrelationships between oral and written language appear more strongly than in previous perspectives: oral language is seen as an integral and important part of children's literacy development.

These theories differ in some respects: the emergent approach supports the idea of universal developmental stages, while the specificity of literacy in different cultures is emphasised by the social constructivist and critical approaches. The emphasis of the emergent perspectives is on the individual while the cultural and social context in which children learn becomes the emphasis for social constructivist perspectives, and the historical and socio-political relationships embedded in these contexts and the power bases within them are raised by critical perspectives.

This brief overview of perspectives in early literacy studies provides a general framework for understanding current trends in this field, which are discussed below. Bloch and Prinsloo (1999), however, have shown that different approaches can be found simultaneously in a school system. They stress that different conceptions of literacy teaching could be present among teachers

and schools even though new trends have become widespread. Herein lies the importance of identifying the origin of practices of literacy instruction and the conceptions underlying them. I will come back to this point when analysing literacy instructional strategies in San Antonio's school (Chapter 6).

2.2. Literacy learning studies: main current features

Perspectives on literacy learning developed between the late 1970s and the 1990s, as emergent, constructivist and critical approaches shifted attention to the social nature of literacy learning. Without discussing their particular characteristics and many variations, this section discusses the main features currently characterising these trends to show how the process of literacy learning is conceptualised in the educational arena, although not necessarily practised in all schools. This will lead to a final discussion relating the two academic fields presented in this chapter.

Studies have shown that literacy learning begins long before children start school (Czerniewska, 1996). Because literacy is part of children's social worlds, they are constantly involved with it and experience its form and functions before they begin learning it formally in school. In interacting with others and in an environment of printed language, children try to work out the many forms, functions and meanings of literacy. Although this point is best applied in literate societies that have a print environment, it is very difficult nowadays to speak of 'pure' non-literate societies (Street, 1995), because all societies have to some extent a relationship with the written word. Even in societies traditionally considered non-literate, it is necessary to consider home and community literacy practices in which children become involved from an early age.

Early literacy studies have developed a greater awareness of the importance of children's social context in literacy learning. More attention is now paid to the home and community as contexts in which literacy is shaped by verbal messages and practices (Cook-Gumpertz, 1986). Studies of different communities, such as those mentioned above, have shown a broad range of literacy practices.

These cross-cultural studies have had an impact on those related to literacy learning. As a result, the view that literacy is not merely a set of decoding and encoding skills, but a communicative practice that develops to the extent that these skills are used by people in their communities, has gained considerable ground (Stromquist, 1997).

In their specific home and community context, therefore, children try to make sense of the functions and forms of literacy present in family life. In doing so, they not only learn about reading and writing, but they also learn about family life and the purposes of reading and writing (Taylor, 1983). Children therefore appear highly motivated to work out the part that literacy plays in their immediate world.

As learners of written language, children must sort out how literacy is used in a particular culture. Learners may take different paths to literacy, but all try to make sense of the written text they encounter and literacy events they observe or in which they are involved. Examples of writing in these early years provide evidence of children's search for the principles underlying their home/community written system (Czerniewska, 1996). As Bisex (1984, cf. by Czerniewska, 1996) explains, children reconstruct their language system (spoken and written). They do this not by accumulating bits and pieces of information, but by discovering, through all the specific information they have, its principles and the rules by which it works.

In this view of literacy learning, children are makers of meaning rather than receivers of knowledge. Theories of reading development have made the child the central agent in the reading process. They move away from reading as a skill to be acquired towards reading as a system of meaning to be discovered by the child (Smith, 1978; Goodman, 1978). Moreover, literacy teaching must begin with the child's own language, reading and writing experiences (Meek, 1991).

These approaches see a stronger link between oral and literate practices. Based on their knowledge of spoken language children try to work out the principles of writing and reading. Reading ability appears linked to an awareness of the constituent sounds of spoken language. These approaches,

however, emphasise that reading activities that remove the sense of texts (meaningless exercises in letter sounds, the use of reading primers with a highly controlled vocabulary) will mystify rather than help the apprentice reader, in clear contrast with the earlier approaches described above (developmentalist, connectivist). Rather, the meaning-making process is viewed as central in reading development. Reading occurs not because children have been fed information about shapes, sounds and words, but because they approach any text with the assumption that it is going to make sense and that they can work out that sense by applying everything they know about spoken language (Czerniewska, 1996).

The main features of current trends in literacy learning stress the central, active role of children as meaning makers, the close relationship between social context and literacy and between spoken and written language, and the existence of early experiences that occur long before the beginning of formal literacy instruction. Most important, literacy skills and practices are seen not merely as a function of decoding and encoding skills, but as the by-product of a constant process of social interaction in various contexts (Stromquist, 1997).

This study addresses literacy learning by taking into account various contexts (i.e. home, community, school) in which literacy is used. The classroom is one of these contexts, and the multigrade classroom, a specific concern of this study, is one in which the diversity of ages, grades and levels allows for varied interaction among children. This educational approach to literacy learning provides a new way of understanding the possibilities of multigrade classrooms, as discussed below.

3. Weaving strands together

A critical point that emerges from this review is the strong interrelationship between NLS and the development of educational approaches which emphasise the importance of social context in literacy and the literacy learning process.

Indeed, the different fields reviewed here have several points in common. The NLS state the need to understand literacy as a social practice in a particular context rather than merely a technical skill. New trends in literacy learning studies also recognise that children's social context is particularly important for their literacy learning, since they try to work out forms, functions and meanings of literacy that are present in this context. Studies of literacy learning have also moved away from a view of literacy as a function of decoding and encoding skills towards the meaning-making process in which children play an active role in a constant process of social interaction. Literacy is viewed as having a strong relation with oral practices and the links between spoken and written language are recognised. In this sense, the continuum between orality and literacy that the NLS raise match with literacy learning studies. In the field of pedagogy, there is also acknowledgement of the importance of social context, community practices and social purposes for literacy learning, as well as a shift from teacher-centred models to a model centred on the child as a meaning maker.

In general, different perspectives and disciplinary approaches coincide in a new way of conceptualising literacy, its learning and teaching, which emphasises meaning and the importance of context. These common elements can lead to a new approach to literacy and literacy learning. This study then advocates for an approach that brings together recent developments in educational perspectives with the NLS approach.

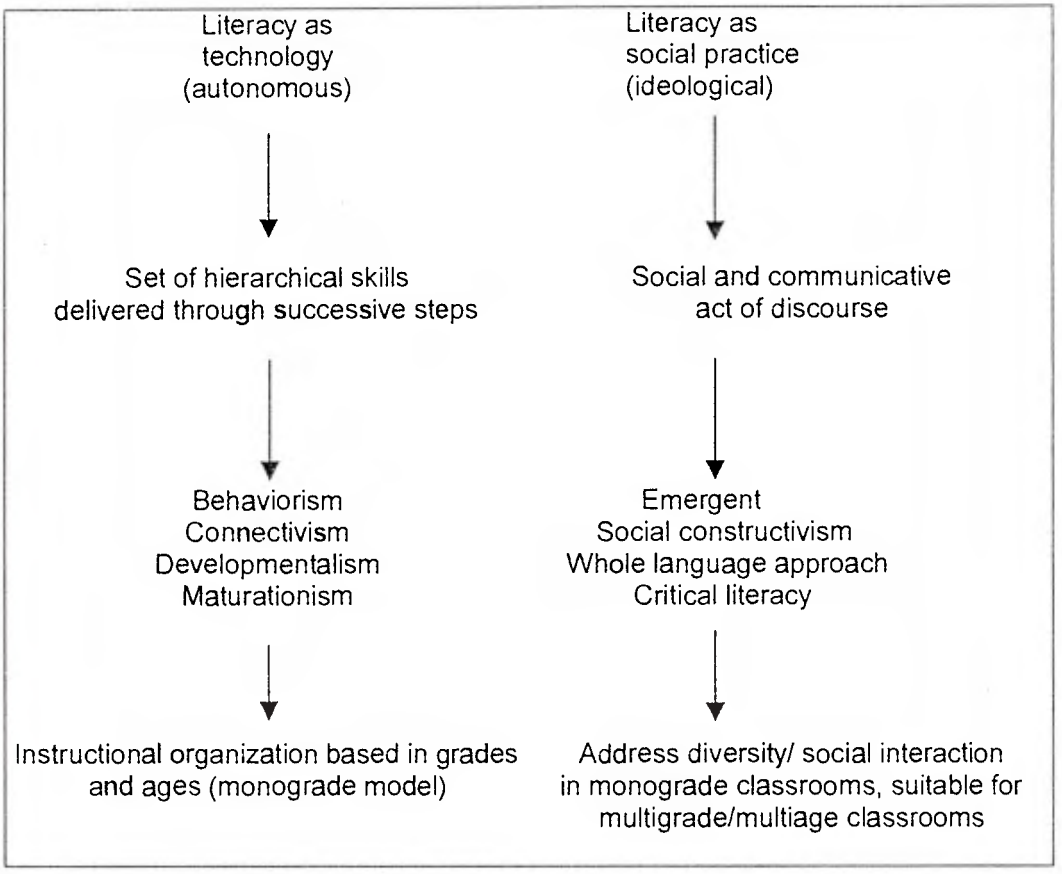
From the studies discussed so far, it appears also that a particular view of literacy involves particular teaching methods. These particularities apply not only to ways of teaching literacy, but also to the school's instructional organization, an issue that is especially important in this study. Links can be

established, for example, between an autonomous model of literacy and the long-dominant focus on literacy in schooling based on skill dimensions of reading and writing. Educational perspectives (e.g. developmentalist, connectivist) that see literacy as a set of isolated skills that can be arranged into a skill hierarchy and therefore taught as a series of steps tie in well with a division of children by ages and grades in which different skills will be taught step by step.

NLS, meanwhile, represents new conceptions that see literacy not merely as a technical matter, but as a socially and ideologically embedded practice. This conception matches with a shift in educational perspectives towards a meaning-centred approach and a reflection on social and cultural practices in which literacy learning takes place.

These new theoretical perspectives, developed by several disciplines, enable us to see multigrade schools in new ways. The shift towards meaning in teaching and learning literacy makes it possible to involve children of different ages and grades in shared activities. Both despite and because of their differences, children's social interaction offers a rich opportunity for learning experiences. Multigrade classrooms, which used to be considered a problem from the point of view of monograde curriculum and instructional strategies, can be reconsidered as viable and enriching educational environments (see also Chapter 3). Figure 1.1 broadly summarises the proposed relationship between theoretical perspectives on literacy, educational approaches and forms of instructional organization.

Figure 1.1. Linking literacy studies, educational approaches and models of instructional organization



This chapter has traced the conceptual framework designed for this study. First, it has discussed different conceptions about literacy that are in play in the field of literacy studies. Then it has explained that the study is framed within the NLS approach and use the main analytical tools developed by this perspective. Following the NLS approach, thus, this study addresses literacy as a social practice in the different domains of children's lives.

Secondly, the theoretical framework of the study is complemented with considerations coming from new perspectives on literacy learning in the educational field. It has been explained how the new ways of viewing literacy learning show a shift from the skills dimension to the social practices involved and stress the importance of context. There is also an openness in educational practices to new strategies that acknowledge diversity among students and the potential of this diversity for learning. Following these studies, then, the study considers children as active meaning-makers in the

literacy learning process and takes into account the social dimension of this process.

Both positions then (NLS and literacy learning studies) contribute to an approach to the multigrade classroom that seeks its possibilities in relation to the social context in which it operates. Thus, the multigrade school is not studied in isolation but in a context with particular characteristics, where literacy is used in different ways. The study seeks to understand the meanings and uses of literacy in rural children's daily lives, what children learn through their participation in social life when literacy is involved, and how their experience in school is informed by these social experiences.

At the same time, the inclusion of educational perspectives helps to answer the question of whether a perspective of literacy as a social practice can contribute to improve literacy teaching and learning in multigrade schools. The study then brings together an examination of literacy in both the social and educational contexts and draws on theoretical insights from NLS and pedagogy to illuminate the practical concerns that educators face in multigrade schools. To carry out these tasks, the fieldwork methods used for the study deserve also special attention. The next chapter addresses these methods, the kind of data gathered through them and the way the research was developed.

CHAPTER 2:

METHODS

Most of the recent literacy studies discussed in the previous chapter stress that a deeper understanding of literacy practices requires an ethnographic approach (Bloch, 1993; Street, 1993, 1995; Barton and Hamilton,1998). Consistent with a theoretical view that stresses the need to study literacy practices within their social and cultural context, this study is an ethnographic account of literacy in the lives of the rural villagers and children of San Antonio. An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to gain insights into the routine events of daily life and the meanings that make social reality (Lareau, 1989). Thus it allows a better understanding of the meanings of literacy for the local people themselves (Street, 2001).

An ethnographic approach involves several fieldwork methods for gathering different kinds of data. This chapter discusses these methods to provide an understanding of the kind of data I was able to collect and how my research developed over time (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Taylor, 1983). The first section explains the criteria and methods used to select the case study, including small case studies in a first stage. I then focus on one particular village and its school, because the qualitative case-study method is recognised as the most suitable for illuminating literacy practices (Zubair, 2001). The second section describes the methods used in this village, including a socio-demographic census, visits to every family, participant observation, interviews with parents, children and teachers, classroom observation and action research with teachers. The third section discusses my role in the village as a participant-observer.

1. Criteria and procedures for selecting the case study

The study used a process of increased focusing to identify a village for in-depth ethnographic study. In the first stage I reviewed secondary sources (e.g., statistical information and literature on literacy and multigrade schools in Peru). I then selected a particular region based on several criteria: a) the relative importance of multigrade schools in the region and the department; b)

the lack of studies about literacy and multigrade teaching (and educational research in general) in the region; and c) the identification of less-studied social groups.

I found that the Amazon region[8], while less populated than others, concentrates 20.5% of Peru's multigrade schools. Most of the (few) studies on multigrade schools (Maurial, 2000, 1993; Uccelli, 1996; Ames, 2001, 1999), however, have been carried out in Southern Andes[9], a region that has 25.7% of the country's multigrade schools (Montero et al, 2002). To help address this lack of attention, the choice for the study was the Department of Ucayali, the second largest department in the Amazon. With its 1,517 multigrade schools (85% of Ucayali's primary schools), Ucayali ranks fifth in the country and second in the Amazon in terms of the absolute number of multigrade schools.

There has been less educational research in the Amazon in general than in the Andes or urban areas, although some research has been conducted over the last decade as part of bilingual educational projects (Trapnell, 1986). Most social and educational research in the area, however, has focused on indigenous populations rather than *mestizo* groups in the Amazon, despite their numerical importance[10] (Rodríguez, 1991; Padoch, 1988).

Once the area was selected, I visited eight villages with multigrade schools to conduct short case studies (see map 1). This allowed me to gather background information about multigrade schools in the area, their general characteristics and the possibilities of conducting the research. The information was collected through observation and informal interviews (see schools and issues in Appendix 2, Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

San Antonio was selected because, despite its particularities, it shares common features with other villages and multigrade schools visited (see Appendix 2, Table 2.1). Two other important points also led me to choose San

[8] The Amazon region includes the following departments: Loreto, Ucayali, Amazonas, San Martín and Madre de Dios. Part of the territory of some other departments is also in the Amazon.
[9] The Southern Andes Region includes the following departments: Cusco, Puno, Ayacucho, Apurímac, Huancavelica.
[10] 81% of Ucayali's rural population belongs to non-indigenous groups, according to the 1981 national census (Rodríguez, 1991).

Antonio. First, the school had a stable staff ("*nombrados*"), which allowed more long-term work with teachers, although there was some staff turnover during the fieldwork. Second, the school's material conditions were basically good, which made it possible to focus on the teaching and learning process. Local authorities, the head teacher and the rest of the teaching staff agreed to the study[11].

2. Research methods and tools used

In my quest for the holistic understanding that an ethnographic approach requires, I participated as much as possible in community life, living in San Antonio for six months between August 2000 and November 2001. I shared the people's daily lives and participated in various special events (see Appendix 2, Table 2.3). All of these activities are part of **participant observation**, which constitutes ethnography's primary research method (Smith, 1986) and allows an understanding of everyday literacies among local people (Street, 2001). I also used several methods for collecting specific information. They are summarised below, with an explanation of the type of data collected and the purpose of each:

a) **Socio-demographic census:** Considers the number of persons living in each household, birthplace, age, sex, kinship relationships, educational level, mother tongue, main and complementary economic activities, relatives living outside the village (networks with other villages or with the city) and relatives living in the village (kinship groups). This information provided a general overview of San Antonio's population in general and of each home in particular.

b) **Printed material census:** Records the availability, number and kind of printed material and media in the home (e.g., use of radio and television). At the community level, I also recorded books available in schools and printed

[11] To introduce myself to school and village authorities, I used formal letters and a personal presentation from my home institution, a research NGO in Lima, stating my status as research student and the main goals of my study.

and handmade posters in the village, to trace the physical presence and kind of literate objects.

c) **Household forms:** Include information and impressions about the 50 households in the village, such as the house's characteristics and layout, printed material visible at home, adults' and children's activities and adult-children interactions. This information became a first "data bank" about home life, which allowed me to identify main activities and duties inside the home and those that were the children's responsibility. It also enabled me to identify the daily routine of the children and their families. This data bank was expanded through further visits to some families.

d) **Selection of homes for in-depth observation:** Taking in account the variety among homes in terms of a) number of members; b) type of families (nuclear or extended)[12], c) socio-economic differences and d) parents' educational level and age, nine homes were selected to represent this diversity (see Appendix 2, Tables 2.4 and 2.5). With this group, I conducted formal interviews with parents, additional visits to each family and informal interviews with children.

e) **Semi-structured interviews with parents:** Applied in each of the selected homes with both parents, when possible (5), with each individually (1) or with only one parent (3). Each interview was tape recorded with the parents' consent. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 to 60 minutes. The purposes of the interview were: first, to explore values and expectations related to literacy and education; second, to inquire about how these values are related to practices that support children's schooling and literacy; third, to understand each parent's educational history, as this provides some insight into how they see themselves, the future they want for their children and how to achieve this; finally, I asked about the ways in which literacy is used at home and in the community. This information was contrasted with literacy events observed in home visits and community life.

[12] A nuclear family consists of both parents and their children. An extended family also includes other relatives, such as grandchildren, in-laws or nieces and nephews. The distinction that other studies make between one-parent and two-parent families (see Lareau, 1989; Clark, 1983) does not apply in San Antonio, because all the families consisted of a couple and single mothers live with their own parents in the context of extended families.

f) **Additional visits to selected homes:** To gather more information about family interactions and literacy events at home. These focused on a group of homes that differed in some respects, helping to determine if these differences were relevant to their literacy practices or if, on the contrary, they shared common practices despite their differences.

g) **Observation of children:** Children were a constant focus of my attention throughout the research. I spent most of the day in their company, inside or out of school. We shared a range of activities: playing, talking, cooking, helping with homework, bathing, fetching water, dancing, watching TV, shopping and going to the city.

Studies of children's literacy used to concentrate in individual cases (for example Solsken, 1993; Taylor, 1983). The children's context in San Antonio, however differs from that of the subjects of those studies, in which children's time was mainly spent inside their homes. In contrast, the time children spend in their homes in San Antonio is small in comparison with the time they spent in the street, on the river or other relatives' homes. They also interact throughout the day with other children, constituting multi-age groups. Thus, while focusing on the observation of 15 children from selected homes, I also expanded the observation to groups of children in which these individuals appeared at different moments.

I constantly recorded the children's activities and their interactions with one another and with me. During some visits, I provided them with paper, pencils and coloured pencils and collected what they wrote or drew. The children always produced these writings (and sometimes reading) spontaneously. Only at the end of fieldwork did I ask some children to write down a story. I also photocopied their school notebooks to collect samples of their writing at school. During classroom observation, I followed up with these children to observe their school performance and their interactions with other children, in order to compare these with interactions observed outside the classroom.

h) **Informal interviews with children:** As part of our daily interaction, I conducted informal interviews with children in selected homes, asking them about their activities and daily routine, their knowledge of the environment and

community affairs, their playmates, who helped them with homework, what they thought of their teachers and why they attended school.

i) **Classroom observations:** Conducted throughout the fieldwork in order to gain a better understanding of strategies for literacy instruction, literacy practices at school and how teachers manage multigrade classrooms. I observed the school's three multigrade classrooms to identify different styles among teachers and their relationship to the children's ages and grades. The planned minimum of two weeks of classroom observation per teacher was not possible in every case because of the teachers' frequent absences. Table 2.6 in Appendix 2 shows the number and duration of observations per teacher, which totalled nearly 85 hours of classroom observation[13] in 55 sessions. Whenever possible, I observed consecutive days in each classroom. Classroom observation consisted of a detailed written record of what happened in the classroom (teacher's actions and children's activities).[14] I also participated in other school activities (see Appendix 2, Table 2.3). Occasionally, I acted as a substitute teacher when needed.[15]

j) **Semi-structured interviews with teachers:** Applied after I had observed the teachers in their classrooms. The first three interviews could not be recorded because of technical problems (notes were taken). The interviews collected some general information (marital status, age, place of residence, qualifications, place and type of pre-service training, access to in-service training, years of experience and years at this school), as well as the teacher's opinions about multigrade schooling, lesson planning and preparation for the multigrade classroom, use of books, concepts about teaching literacy and expectations of further training. The same interview was applied (this time tape-recorded) to two new teachers during the following school year. At the end of the second school year, new interviews were

[13] It is estimated that in Peruvian rural schools, children get approximately 250 hours of lessons per year (MED, 2002). The total number of hours observed for this research represents 34% of the estimated total number of hours per school year, although I actually was in the village for two-thirds of the school year.

[14] Because the noise level made the tape recording of lessons unsuccessful, the written account was a better method.

[15] At first, I was reluctant to replace absent teachers because it prevented me from observing teachers' classroom activities. After I had collected some classroom observations, however, I helped by taking charge of a classroom for a session, a day or a week at most.

applied, along with a questionnaire about teachers' conceptions of literacy learning and instruction. This second set of interviews (tape-recorded) raised particular aspects of teachers' practice as well as their assessment of the children's overall performance, with particular reference to the children from the selected homes.

k) **Action research:** During part of my fieldwork, I worked with teachers using an action research approach. The aim was to develop suitable strategies for literacy learning in multigrade classrooms. The teachers and I met twice a week for four weeks. At the first meeting each week, we discussed a relevant problem related to literacy instruction and multigrade management and designed a lesson plan. Then each teacher applied the general lesson plan with the modifications she considered necessary for her class. I observed each of these lessons. At the second meeting, we discussed and evaluated the lesson carried out and the agenda for the following week. Each meeting was tape recorded with the teachers' permission. For the sessions, I drew on the teachers' experiences and practices and used supporting material consisting of nine modules for multigrade teaching (Montero et al, 2002), which the teachers kept. Teachers were also provided with notebooks to keep a journal of the action research process. In the last interview, they were asked about their overall assessment of this experience. A more in-depth analysis of this process, including methodological considerations, is found in Chapter 7.

3. My role(s) in the community

I participated in the villagers' daily life not as a passive observer, but in a variety of forms, as researcher, neighbour, friend, occasional teacher and tutor. This gave me access to different kinds of data and experiences from a variety of perspectives. My first concern was to maintain a role independent from a particular institution in order to become involved in the different domains of life that interested me: home, school and community.

Thus, although my research involved intensive contact with school, I tried to maintain some independence from the school system and staff for several reasons. Being closely associated with the school could reduce parents' trust

and their willingness to openly express their opinions about the school, while close association with the school administration could make teachers interpret my presence as supervision. For this reason, I approached the teachers directly rather than through the administrative offices. I was willing to ask for formal authorization if requested, but no one made such a request.

To a great extent, I achieved my goal of being perceived as independent from the school staff and administration. Neither parents nor children called me "teacher"[16] even when I occasionally took charge of a classroom.

My role and position in the village were also influenced by other issues, such as my professional status, outsider origin and gender, ethnic aspects and my friendship with the local priest.

My professional status and my outsider origin were evident (because of language, general appearance, clothes). I tried to avoid the distance implied by this status, sharing people's daily activities and building trust. My outsider origin with regard to ethnicity was also revealing. When I first arrived, most villagers thought I was a foreigner (although I am Peruvian) because I had lighter skin than most people in town. This led to a respectful treatment from villagers, who always called me "Miss Patty." Although my friendship with the villagers grew, they continued to use the title before my name, but they explained that this was a sign of "respect," not a lack of trust.

Despite the differences the villagers of San Antonio perceived between us, they were very open and friendly and involved me in their daily lives. I shared with many people the intimacy of daily life, their problems, thoughts, opinions and plans for the future. Overall, I think my efforts at establishing a horizontal relationship with parents, teachers and children were largely successful because of the multiplicity of roles I finally assumed in the village. I must add also that parents and children kindly give me their permission to include some photographs of them in this thesis.

[16] By convention, teachers are always called by their first names but with the title "Teacher" before the name (e.g., teacher Mario), both inside and outside the classroom.

Because I was woman and lived in the local priest's house, at first some villagers considered me a nun. Others thought I was the priest's wife or daughter. I soon cleared up these misunderstandings when I explained the purpose of my study. Finally, I think people in the village more clearly understood my work in their own terms: I was interested in their children's education and its improvement. This was certainly true. This interest was very positive for them and allowed their collaboration. When I presented the action research proposal to the Parents' Association and the Communal Assembly, parents interpreted my work as a reciprocal relationship in which I would learn from them and they would learn from me.

CHAPTER 3:

MULTIGRADE TEACHING AND ITS PLACE IN THE CURRENT PERUVIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Introduction

The shifts in pedagogy and literacy learning discussed in Chapter 1 have influenced the Peruvian school system in many ways. This is particularly true in the ongoing pedagogical reform, which is introducing changes in pedagogy, learning and teaching strategies. To understand the current situation of multigrade schools, this chapter places them in a broader institutional context, in both national and international dimensions. First, I situate multigrade teaching in historical, geographical and pedagogical terms. A review of multigrade teaching research and practice worldwide and in Latin America then provides useful insights for analysing current trends in the Peruvian school system and the place of multigrade teaching in it. The second section discusses the new pedagogical approach in Peru and the changes it has introduced. These changes, it is argued, open up several possibilities for multigrade teaching and literacy learning, but also pose several challenges. The main problems are related to the invisibility of multigrade schools, even in the reform, and the conditions under which multigrade schools currently operate. More explicit attention must be paid to the needs of multigrade schools to improve educational quality. Both strategies developed elsewhere in the world and the strategies that Peruvian teachers create in their daily encounters with multigrade classrooms are important resources for this task, a point that is further explored in Chapter 6.

1. Multigrade teaching

What is multigrade teaching? How did multigrade schools arise around the world? Are they effective instructional settings? What make multigrade schools successful? These are the main questions addressed in this section, drawing on educational research related to multigrade schooling. This section begins with an overview of multigrade teaching, then focuses on a review of

the practices developed through various educational projects for multigrade schools. Particular emphasis is placed on Latin American experiences, because the region shares common characteristics with Peru. This makes it possible to identify common strategies and issues that receive more attention in Latin America.

1.1. What is multigrade teaching?

Multigrade teaching refers to the teaching by one teacher of children working at several grade levels or in several age groups (Hargreaves, 2000). Although this was common in Europe and North America as a first form of state-supported schools, the division of schools by age and grade became a universal ideal in the late 19th and 20th centuries. This development was consistent with the division of labour in industry and was made possible by the concentration of the population in cities. The monograde model, in which a teacher is in charge of just one age or grade group, became dominant in school, class and curriculum organisation (Little, 1995; Miller, 1991; Pratt, 1986) through specific historical and social processes.

Although multigrade teaching is still widespread throughout the world, it is little-known and scarcely acknowledged in national and international educational agendas. As Little (2001, 1995) shows, although there is a lack of homogeneous statistical information about this kind of school, information from various sources suggests that multigrade teaching is more common than is generally realised.

Although multigrade teaching is common, the conditions under which it arises are varied. A broad but important distinction is made between necessity and choice (Little, 2001). In some cases, multigrade teaching arises from pedagogical choice, especially in developed countries. In most cases, however, it arises through necessity. In developing countries, multigrade schools are often necessary because of geographic, demographic and material difficulties, and therefore these schools are seen as an inferior kind of solution (Thomas and Shaw, 1992). In these countries, multigrade schools are usually characterised by teachers with less experience and training and the

worst physical and material conditions, including educational supplies, aids, and support (Little, 1995).

These factors have contributed to the low prestige of multigrade schools (in comparison with monograde schools), implying a constant question about the viability of such an educational environment. Nevertheless, this has not always been the case. During the 1960s and 1970s, the multigrade school became a major educational innovation in North America, England and Sweden (Miller, 1990; Pratt, 1986; Little, 2001). Although the dominant instructional organisation remains the monograde model, multigrade classrooms are still mandatory in several U.S. states (Lodish, 1992), Canada (Pratt, 1986) and Australia (Russell et al, 1998). Other developed countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and Finland, also retain multigrade schools (Pratt, 1986; Miller, 1991; Little, 2001).

Various studies have addressed the effects of multigrade classrooms on student achievement, and thus the viability of this model of instructional organisation, through comparison with monograde classrooms. This research has shown that multigrade classrooms have no negative effects on students' academic achievement and that they can have positive effects in the affective dimension (see Little, 1995; Thomas and Shaw, 1992; Miller, 1990, 1991; Veenman, 1995, 1996; Vincent, 1999; Pratt, 1986; Psacharopoulus et al, 1992; McEwan, 1998). This evidence has shown the multigrade classroom to be an equally effective instructional environment and even a powerful pedagogical tool.

To reap the potential benefits of multigrade classrooms, however, multigrade programs must be adequately implemented (Little, 2001; Thomas and Shaw, 1992). The main components of successful multigrade methodology identified in the growing literature on multigrade teaching are: instruction delivery and grouping, self-directed learning, peer tutoring, adequate classroom management and instructional organisation of the curriculum. The teacher's ability to plan and organise is also emphasised. Greater flexibility is required in using different methods and activities, along with a focus on learning that acknowledges not only the student's active role, but also the previous

knowledge that he or she brings to the classroom (Thomas and Shaw, 1992; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997; Miller, 1991; NWREL, 2001; UNICEF Philippines, 1995). This body of literature also emphasises the need for suitable materials and teacher training in multigrade techniques, as well as greater flexibility in the curriculum, local and regional support, advisory structures and decentralisation of administration.

In the quest for better education in multigrade schools, several handbooks for teachers have been produced in the past decade that present multigrade methodology in a practical, detailed way. They have been produced mainly in Asian and South Pacific countries with the support of international agencies (Collingwood, 1991; UNICEF Phillipines, 1995; Sinha, 1998; UNICEF/MOET Vietnam, 1998); in the Caribbean area (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997); and for rural schools in the United States (Vincent, 1999; Miller, 1989; Sumner, 1993). In Latin America, this search for better educational service in multigrade schools has also led to various educational projects that offer detailed insights into how to manage multigrade classrooms, as next section shows.

The growing body of literature briefly presented in this section indicates the worldwide presence of multigrade schools despite the dominance of the monograde model, the viability of multigrade teaching as an alternative and equally effective way of organising instruction, and the need for adequate programs to enhance the effectiveness of multigrade schools. Educational research and practice have pointed out several strategies for successful multigrade teaching and constitute an important resource for teachers and policy planners. A more detailed review of these strategies in Latin America is presented below.

1.2. Multigrade teaching in Latin America: educational practice

In Latin America, there has been an increase in attention from educational projects, governments and international agencies to multigrade schools and the question of how to manage them adequately. Looking at educational interventions in multigrade schools, it is possible to identify the most important

factors in effective attention. This background information will help us analyse current conditions in Peruvian schools.

The most influential project addressing multigrade teaching in the region is the *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia, which began in the mid-1970s. *Escuela Nueva* has been one of the most successful experiences in educational innovation. Its central features include an emphasis on active pedagogy, stimulus for self-directed learning, production of self-directed learning guides, use of group work and peer tutoring, classroom organisation with learning corners, school government and a close relationship with the community, ranging from participation by parents and teachers in school management to parents' involvement in learning experiences (Schiefelbein, 1993; Reimers, 1993; Pscharopoulus et al, 1992).

Many of the central features of *Escuela Nueva* model have been incorporated into educational projects in Bolivia (Subirats et al, 1991; Secretaría Nacional de Educación, 1992), Guatemala (Ministerio de Educación, 1996), Ecuador (UNICEF/PROANDES, 1997), Brazil (Fundescola/MEC, 1999), Mexico (Ezpeleta, 1997; CONAFE, 1996), and to a lesser extent in other countries, such as Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile (Schiefelbein, 1993).

A large body of literature on multigrade teaching in different parts of Latin America (Psacharopoulus, 1992; Schiefelbein, 1993; UNICEF/UNESCO, 1995; Secretaria de Educación de Bolivia, 1992; Reimers, 1993; Calvo, 1996; Fundescola/MEC, 1999; Ministerio de Educación Ecuador, 1997, 1974; Ministerio de Educación Guatemala, 1996; Ministerio de Educación Peru, 1995; UNICEF/PROANDES, 1997; Subirats et al, 1991; FEBLI, 1997; World Bank, 1994, 1997) shows several points in common among the countries.

In **curriculum planning**, most projects follow the national curriculum in each country. There is an emphasis on diversification and adaptation of the curriculum to the local context. In some cases, the curriculum is divided into two- or three-year cycles for teaching several grades together (Guatemala, Mexico), or into modules (Colombia), to enable children to work at their own pace.

In **organisation and classroom layout**, all cases emphasise the need for an appropriate physical environment with sufficient and adequate furniture for group work. The use of learning corners is encouraged, along with the use of local materials for implementing them. Most projects have learning corners, and there is an emphasis on them as an active part of and useful tool for the learning process. The educational setting is also conceived as extending beyond the school, and other spaces in the school and community are used for educational purposes.

Teaching and learning strategies constitute one of the central points in the literature reviewed. There is consensus in the region on the need for an active learning, child-centred approach and learning-centred strategies. With few exceptions, mainly in projects carried out before 1975 (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 1974), the predominant pedagogical model resembles the constructivist approach.

Learning strategies that have received greater attention are **self-directed learning** (with the support of self learning guides and worksheets) and **peer tutoring** (co-operative group work among children of the same or different grades).

The teacher's role changes with this pedagogical orientation. A teacher-centred model is giving way to a new role in which the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning. There is also recognition that students learn at different paces and a search for ways to allow children to develop at their own pace.

There is a constant call for linking educational content and activities with the students' social and cultural context and to use their previous knowledge to achieve better learning outcomes. This is also part of a call for a closer **relationship between the school and the community**, which seeks increased participation by and commitment from parents, ranging from their presence as educational actors in the school to the management of the school itself.[17]

[17] See especially the case of El Salvador Education Team (n/d) and the EDUCO programme.

Student organisation is another aspect receiving increased attention, with school government and similar strategies seen as spaces for developing values and attitudes of responsibility, solidarity, tolerance and respect.

Educational materials have been specially developed in the form of self-learning guides, which are seen as an essential tool for multigrade schools. The importance of texts and books is emphasised, and many classroom or school libraries had been implemented in several countries. Another issue related to the production of educational materials has been handbooks and guides for teachers, to provide them with some orientation to the new strategies and as a complementary tool for in-service training.

In **classroom planning**, there is an emphasis on the need for adequate management of several grades at the same time. **Flexible promotion** has been introduced by *Escuela Nueva* as an assessment tool that allows children to learn at their own pace.

The most common form of **teacher training** has been in-service training. There have been various strategies (in cascade, with multiplier teams, with demonstrative centres), some more successful than others. In all cases, there is an emphasis on departing from and returning to the classroom, to allow teachers to modify their teaching practices effectively. An essential tool for this has been continuity through monitoring and the formation of teachers' networks or micro-centres as support groups.

Comparing these trends to practices worldwide, one finds that strategies for multigrade classrooms in Latin America generally match guidelines developed in other parts of the world. In Latin America, however, there seems to be an emphasis on a closer relationship between school and community, as well as between national curriculum and local knowledge. Despite of the success of some educational projects in addressing multigrade teaching, such as Colombia's *Escuela Nueva* or Guatemala's NEU, there are still multigrade schools that remain unattended in other Latin American countries. This is the case of Peru, whose complexity will be discussed below.

2. The Peruvian school system: understanding the current educational reform

In 1993, the General Assessment of Peruvian Education (MED, 1993) showed severe problems in the quality of education offered in schools. As a result, the Ministry of Education has introduced several changes in the school system since 1996 as part of an ongoing educational reform: a new pedagogical approach, a new curriculum, in-service training and the distribution of new books and educational materials. The reform implies new concepts of learning and teaching, as well as new ways of organising teaching and curriculum.

Although there was not a specific programme for multigrade schools, in this chapter I will argue that these changes present several possibilities for multigrade teaching. They also pose challenges and face problems, however. To understand the current situation of multigrade schools, this section provides an overview of the reform and the changes it has introduced. A necessary point of departure will be the educational approach underlying the new pedagogical model (i.e., contructivism), the way in which it is expressed in the area addressed by this study (literacy learning), and how the changes introduced could benefit multigrade schools.

2.1. What is constructivism?: a new paradigm for learning

The designers of the new pedagogical model in Peru have drawn upon a variety of instructional approaches characteristic of what is called "new pedagogy" (Cuenca, 2000; Schüssler, 2001). These approaches contrast with "traditional" education — based on a teacher-centred approach and rote learning — because they adopt a child-centred approach and emphasise active learning strategies. This model's main foundation comes from constructivist approaches. Nevertheless, there are differences among constructivist approaches across several disciplines that make a sense of unity problematic when using the term "constructivism" (Phillips, 2000, 1995; Cobb, 1994; Fosnot, 1996; Gergen, 1999). This section traces the main strands within constructivist approaches in order to clarify this concept and

situate the Peruvian pedagogical model within it. The next section analyses the new pedagogical model and points out other influences that complement the constructivism approach.

Despite differences among constructivist approaches, the different strands of constructivism have several points in common:

- Knowledge is constructed by individuals when making sense of their world (Stromquist, 1997; Fosnot, 1996; Wood, 1995).

- Learning is a constructive process of meaning making, and learners play an active role in the creation of their own knowledge (Wood, 1995; Von Glasersfeld, 1996; Stromquist, 1997).

- Teaching involves supporting students as they attempt to make sense of the problems they encounter. Teaching therefore allows a great deal of discovery and experimentation among learners (Wood, 1995; Stromquist, 1997).

- A call for attention to the natural diversity among students. Constructivism considers this diversity a useful opportunity for learning, as in their interaction with one another students increase their own understandings (Stromquist, 1997).

This common set of ideas represents a challenge to traditional assumptions that view learners as passive recipients of knowledge transmitted directly by the teacher. Previous concepts about knowledge, the learning process and ways of teaching are also challenged. Since knowledge is viewed as constructed by individuals, conceptual knowledge cannot be transferred from teacher to student; rather, the teacher must provide students with opportunities for building it (Von Glasersfeld, 1996). A new way of understanding learning and knowledge, therefore, has several implications for education and teaching strategies. And here, as Fosnot (1996) points out, it must be noted that constructivism is a theory about learning, not a description of teaching. Therefore, although it clearly has implications for teaching, there is not a clear-cut set of teaching strategies. Educators must be aware of what learning entails in order to build appropriate teaching strategies to enhance it.

Differences within constructivist approaches also play a role in this understanding and the kind of teaching derived from it. These differences lie in three main dimensions, which are discussed below.

A first dimension is the debate between those who stress the individual role in the learning process and those who emphasise the socially and culturally situated nature of learning. The first position, usually called "cognitive constructivism" (Fosnot, 1996) or simply constructivism (Gerner, 1999), is based mainly in the work of Piaget and has been further developed by Von Glasersfeld (1996, 1995). This position sees individual learners as actively constructing their ways of knowing as they strive to make sense of their world, defined in terms of personal experience (Cobb, 1996). The emphasis, therefore, is on the individual subject's experience and the development of his or her cognitive structures (Von Glassersfeld, 1996).

Emphasis on the isolated individual learner has been criticised, however, because it pays little attention to the role of social context in the construction of knowledge. A second position, which mainly follows the work of Vygotsky, focuses on the social nature of learning. This position is often called "social constructivism" (Fosnot, 1996) or "sociocultural constructivism" (Cobb, 1996; Steffe and Gale, 1995; Wertsch and Toma, 1995). This view emphasises that key aspects of mental functioning can be understood only by considering the social contexts in which they are embedded, since knowledge is achieved through participation in social practice. Learning, like human action in general, is situated in cultural, historical and institutional contexts. Socio-cultural processes are given analytic priority in understanding individual mental functioning. The classroom itself is approached as a social site (Wertsch and Toma, 1995; Konold, 1995; Bauersfeld, 1995).

Although both positions present different emphases and lead to different teaching strategies, several authors argue that it is possible to co-ordinate the two perspectives (Cobb, 1996; Fosnot, 1996; Phillips 1995). Learning as cognitive self-organisation assumes that the child is participating in cultural practices, while learning as participation in culture recognises an actively constructing child. Therefore, learning can be understood as both a process of

self-organisation and a process of enculturation that occurs while participating in cultural practices, frequently while interacting with others (Cobb, 1996). The emphasis on the individual or on the social does not necessarily deny the validity of the other aspect in the construction of knowledge. As Fosnot (1996) points out, the question that emerges is not whether one or the other (individual vs. social interaction) is most important, but about the interplay between them.

Indeed, beyond the emphasis of these two positions on the mechanisms at work in the learning process (individual vs. social), both have the same general interest: how individuals learn and construct knowledge. Phillips (2000) calls both strands "psychological constructivism," because the centre of interest is the psychological understanding of individual learners. This type of constructivism, which is the most widely present in educational literature, is the one at the core of Peru's current pedagogical model (see next section). In looking more closely at the Peruvian model, we will examine how the individual and social aspects of learning are addressed.

A second dimension in which differences arise involves the social construction of knowledge in broader terms. In contrast with the psychological constructivist model's emphasis on the individual learner (with an emphasis on either the individual process or the social nature of learning), Phillips (2000, 1995) points out that others strands of constructivism are more concerned with the construction of human knowledge in general and how groups and communities participate in it. Because the development of knowledge is seen as essentially social in nature, constructed not by individuals but by the groups and communities to which they belong, Phillips (2000) calls this approach "social constructivism" or "social constructionist," but differentiates it from the social approaches in psychological constructivism presented above. The main difference is that within psychological constructivism, those who address the social aspect are still interested in the ways it affects individual cognition, whilst this second strand addresses cognition as part of social and political processes.[18] Gergen (1999), for

[18]These two strands, however, have points in common. See Konold (1995) for similarities between social constructionism and socio-cultural approaches.

example, points out that social constructionism puts the emphasis on discourse as the vehicle through which self and world are articulated and the way in which such discourse functions within social relationships. The emphasis on how understandings of self and world are influenced by the power that social structures exert over people is also addressed by sociological constructionism (Gergen, 1999) and can also be identified in feminist epistemology (Phillips, 1995). Nevertheless, there is not a clear-cut division among these positions, but rather a kind of continuum among them, with variations in the emphasis placed on the role of the social.

Finally, a third dimension among constructivist positions is that there is not complete agreement on the general function of cognition or even the nature of knowledge. Again, there is a range of positions along a continuum that extends from a realist to a radical view (Cobb, 1994). For realists, mental structures constructed by learners correspond to or match external structures of the environment. Knowledge is therefore seen as an accurate representation of external things, situations and events. Radical constructivists do not consider knowledge a representation of reality, nor do they believe there is an observer-independent objective world. Therefore, cognition serves to organise the subject's experiential world, emphasising the individual nature of knowledge (Cobb, 1994; Von Glasersfeld, 1996; Fosnot, 1996).

These discussions involve further philosophical, ontological and epistemological issues related to the nature of knowledge and cognition. They also influence different approaches to teaching that address in different ways individual experience, social interaction and issues of social identity, power and culture within the wider society. There is a rich, ongoing debate over the term constructivism, and this debate informs different approaches to teaching. This variety within constructivism, however, also creates some confusion in using the term. This section has traced the main differences in the field to help identify the strand of constructivism mainly used in the Peruvian pedagogical model. The next section will explore this issue in greater depth.

2.2. The new pedagogical model in Peru

From the information presented above, it is possible to situate the new pedagogical approach (NEP[19]) in Peru within psychological constructivism. In particular, cognitive constructivism (i.e., the work of Piaget and Brunner) appears to be most influential in the model. However, the socio-cultural approach and the ideas developed by Vigotsky are also present in the NEP (Frisancho, 1996; Cuenca, 2000).

To provide some insights into the main features of the NEP, it is useful to consider the Basic Curricular Structure for primary education produced by the Ministry of Education (MED). This is the main document upon which teachers are expected to base their teaching. The concept of learning that underlies the NEP is clearly presented in the Basic Curricular Structure:

> "Learning is understood as a process of construction of knowledge. Children themselves elaborate knowledge in interaction with social and natural reality, alone or with the help of some mediators (persons or educational materials, for example), using their experiences and previous knowledge. A child learns when he is able to elaborate a personal representation about an object of the reality or when he elaborates an answer for a given situation." (MED, 2000: 21)

This definition of learning is clearly based on a constructivist approach. The child appears at the centre of the learning process and as active learner. Knowledge is viewed as a personal representation of reality, but it is not clear at what point this strand of constructivism lies on the continuum between realist and radical positions.

The emphasis on a child-centred approach minimises the teacher's role to some extent, because the teacher is seen as a mediator at the same level as educational materials. Nevertheless, constructivist approaches strongly state the teacher's essential role in supporting and scaffolding children's learning. The way the NEP is presented, then, helps to understand why so many teachers feel confused about their new role. The same document also presents a new conceptualisation of teaching:

[19] Nuevo Enfoque Pedagógico

> "Teaching is no longer an activity of knowledge transmission and explanation, but rather an interactive process in which children construct their knowledge in active relationship with their context, schoolmates, working materials and teacher (...) Teaching therefore can be conceptualised as a set of aids that the teacher offers to children in their personal process of constructing their knowledge" (Ibid., 22).

Here, the role of teacher reappears in the educational act. First, it is clearly indicated what a teacher should not be, establishing a distance from traditional models of teaching. The teacher's role is then presented as one of orientation, in which the teacher creates the necessary conditions to help children in their process of learning, recognising its importance. There are, however, no clear indications about how the teacher is to perform such a role.

The importance of the child's previous experiences and knowledge and the context of the learning process is another key issue in the NEP, which clearly states that "any meaningful learning is not produced in isolation, but is related and connected to other situations and learning" (Ibid.: 21). The recognition of previous knowledge as useful, important and a necessary point of departure for developing new learning is an integral part of the new definition of learning provided by the Basic Curricular Structure. This contrasts with previous assumptions in teaching models that see the student as "*tabula rasa,*" someone who needs to be taught and to receive knowledge from teacher.

The Basic Curricular Structure establishes the need for diversification of the curriculum's contents, given the Peruvian population's cultural, social and ethnic diversity. Although every student must achieve the basic competencies stated in the Basic Curricular Structure, the ways in which they are developed must be in close relationship with the children's contexts (Ibid.: 16).

The recognition of diversity and the need to address it in the school context is undoubtedly an important step in the curricular framework of the Peruvian school system. The national curriculum has been characterised over the years as a centralised one, with no place for the students' learning needs, previous knowledge or cultural diversity (Montoya, 1990; Trapnell, 1991). Moreover, the importance of social context that the process of diversification addresses

could imply a socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning, which could complement a focus on the individual learner.

These few examples show that the NEP currently encouraged in Peru is based on a constructivist approach with an emphasis on the individual learner. In this sense, it is similar to the cognitive constructivism described in the previous section. Nevertheless, there is some recognition of the social dimension of learning (and therefore elements of a socio-cultural approach), because interactions with peers and other adults are considered sources of learning. The central role of previous knowledge and the need for curricular diversification also testify to the importance of the social and cultural context in the learning process. Nevertheless, the emphasis is still on the individual learner, indicating a psychological approach rather than a social one (i.e., cognition as part of social and political processes). The nature of knowledge does not receive particular attention in official documents or Peruvian educational literature, but they are more concerned with the practical implications of the new concepts of teaching and learning, as these represent a major challenge to previous educational practice.

Beyond the strong presence of cognitive constructivism, as well as some elements of the socio-cultural approach, other instructional models have also been influential in the design of the NEP. Cuenca (2000) points out these various influences: Ausubel's interest in the affective dimension of learning, especially motivation, and previous knowledge; the sequential model of instruction proposed by Gagné; the importance of environmental conditions raised by Skinner; the role of the teacher as "model of learning," taken from Bandura; motivation for better learning from conductist Thorndike; the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development from Vigotsky; and the idea of learning by discovery proposed by Bruner. All these influences have led to an eclectic, dynamic model that is in constant revision, with a strong foundation in a constructivist approach to learning. How this model is expressed in literacy learning and the approaches that influence it are discussed in next section.

2.3. Literacy learning in the NEP

Under the NEP, the curriculum has been reorganised, replacing the traditional division of subjects (i.e., mathematics, language, etc.) with five curricular areas to be developed in an integrated way.[20] The area that deals most directly with literacy learning is Integral Communication. The aim of this area is:

> "to develop children's **communicative and linguistic competencies** so that they become able to understand and express oral and written messages competently in different communicative situations and with different interlocutors; and to understand and produce different kinds of texts, to obtain information, to satisfy their functional communication needs and enjoy the texts" (MED, 2000: 33).

This approach to literacy learning emphasises communication as the main purpose of oral and written language. The Basic Curricular Structure follows the same approach, emphasising that the child looks for meaning when reading a text to satisfy different needs (to get information, to learn, for entertainment, to follow instructions, etc.). Writing also implies communication, with clarity about what is being written, about what and to whom. Thus the child is expected to realise that a fundamental function of oral or written language is to establish communication, exchanging and sharing ideas, knowledge, feelings and experiences in real situations and for real needs. Despite this communicative approach, however, literacy is still defined as "an object that serves for communication" (Ibid.: 33) rather than as a tool for communicative purposes or a social practice.

A textual approach also underlies this curriculum area. It involves the idea that written language is composed of different kinds of texts, which correspond to different communicative situations.

> "The child, from his first encounters with written materials, constructs hypotheses about their meanings, departing from various clues (titles, subtitles, format, etc.)." (Ibid.: 34)

It is also stated that the most helpful indication is the communicative context through which the reader encounters the text. Construction of meanings is

[20] The new curricular areas are Logic Mathematics, Integral Communication, Personal Social, Science and Environment, and Religious Formation.

personal; each child builds her or his own idea about the text and produces her or his texts in particular and personal ways.

The foundations on which literacy learning is conceptualised show traces of a constructivist approach along with elements of textual and communicative approaches. Although the emphasis is clearly on the individual learner, there is room to address the socio-cultural context because of the emphasis on communication and the social nature of communicative contexts.

This approach to literacy learning is consistent with the main features of the NEP proposed by the reform, but implies a challenge for teachers accustomed to a more traditional approach to literacy learning. Several references in the Basic Curricular Structure warn against the use of such approaches:

> "To achieve these competencies, it is vital to reflect on the literacy learning methods that the school uses: handwriting exercises and extended copying of letters, syllables and words, as well as dictation of words and sentences that lack meaning. Recent research indicates that with these procedures, girls and boys require approximately four years to understand the text they are reading, and even more to produce writing in an autonomous way" (Ibid.: 35)

Education planners leading the reform are aware of the teaching methods that predominate in schools and are seeking to change them. In-service training courses have been designed to introduce teachers in the NEP. The question remains however, to what extent the proposed changes have been implemented in schools, particularly multigrade schools. This case study will provide some evidence about the ways in which literacy learning is carried out and the NEP is managed. To understand the situation faced by multigrade schools, however, it is necessary to analyse the possibilities and limitations of these innovations for multigrade teaching.

3. Possibilities and problems for literacy learning in multigrade schools

The current reform in Peruvian primary education offers several possibilities for improving the management of multigrade schools and literacy learning in them. It also poses several problems. This section examines both. Taking into account the areas attended by multigrade teaching programs presented in the

first section and the changes introduced by the NEP in Peru, it is possible to identify several implications of the reform for multigrade teaching and literacy learning in curriculum planning, teacher training, teaching and learning strategies, resources for learning, and the place of context and previous knowledge in learning process. The practical conditions under which multigrade schools operate are also addressed, and the section offers an evaluation of the overall situation of multigrade schools within the reform.

3.1. Curriculum planning

The new Basic Curricular Structure is organised in three two-year cycles, replacing the previous structure of programs for each grade. Each cycle corresponds to curricular units through which students develop a set of competencies. The first cycle presents the competencies to be worked on in grades 1 and 2, the second corresponds to grades 3 and 4, and the third cycle to grades 5 and 6. This reorganisation could provide a useful opportunity for multigrade teachers, especially when they must teach two grades of the same cycle.

Teachers could develop their curricular projects on a two-year basis, looking for achievement of competencies in the entire group at the end of that period. This would facilitate curriculum planning, as teachers would not have to deal with two different programs. Some multigrade programs are based on this type of curriculum organisation (CONAFE, 1996; Ministerio de Educación Guatemala, 1996). In Peru, competencies for each cycle follow a basic structure that is progressively upgraded according to cycle, facilitating multigrade curriculum planning. Appendix 3 provides an example of three competencies of Integral Communication during the three cycles. The whole set of competencies should be developed throughout the three cycles, with more complex capacities and attitudes added in each cycle. This could help the literacy learning process in multigrade schools, as literacy is not presented as a rigid set of graded skills, but as a means of communication in which children of different ages and grades can be engaged, developing literacy skills at their own pace with the support of older classmates and the teacher.

In the multigrade environment, however, the new curriculum faces several pragmatic problems. First, ideally the same teacher would be in charge of the same group for two consecutive years. Careful planning by regional and local education entities would also be required. As I will show later, however, this is unlikely in the current context, because of the inconsistency of organisation. Second, planning is still difficult for teachers who have more than one cycle in the same classroom and must manage several programs at the same time. To aid multigrade curriculum planning, the Basic Curricular Structure must make explicit the continuities along the three cycles. Third, because they have been trained to plan for the monograde classroom, teachers would require support in curriculum planning from regional and local education entities. Finally, teachers need guidance in identifying suitable literacy learning activities for children of different grades, developing their own skills at the same time.

3.2. Teacher training

In-service teacher training to introduce the NEP has been provided for primary teachers since 1996. For many multigrade teachers who work in isolated areas and are unable to attend optional training courses, this training has provided an opportunity to learn about new developments in teaching strategies and literacy learning. Teachers are more willing to attend training courses, as they have been offered more broadly than in previous years (Ames, 2001).

Training courses have limitations, however. First, they are based on a monograde model. The proposed strategies and activities use the monograde classroom as the usual setting for teaching, although most schools in rural areas are multigrade. Second, not all teachers have received training, either because they were teaching a cycle other than the one considered for the training, or because they had only temporary contracts. Third, the teacher training strategy follows the cascade model, which can transmit and multiply difficulties and reflects differences among training institutions (Schüssler, 2001). Fourth, the teacher training strategy itself rarely follows a constructivist approach. Teachers are usually told that what they know is wrong and that

they should use new strategies. Their previous knowledge is not considered part of their learning. Training sessions are often conducted in large groups, with inadequate attention to the teachers' individual needs. Finally, the duration of training (three weeks in one school year) appears to be too short to introduce major changes in teachers' practice. Given the short duration of training, particular areas, such as literacy learning, could receive less specific attention.

It is also important to note that implementation of the reform has followed a top-down model. Teachers have not have the opportunity to become involved in different levels of decision-making regarding new shifts in pedagogy, the design of educational material or curriculum planning. As some authors (Villegas-Reimers and Reimers, 1996; Braslavsky and Cosse, 1997) point out, there is a common trend in reforms currently being implemented in Latin America that excludes and minimises the participation of teachers. This could have negative implications for the adoption of the new pedagogical strategies introduced.

3.3. Teaching and learning strategies

The teaching and learning strategies of a constructivism-based pedagogical model could be useful in dealing with multigrade settings. Firstly, the recognition of the role of classmates as resources for learning has led to strategies of peer-tutoring and working groups. Secondly, the emphasis on active learning allows more flexibility in the kind and variety of activities in which children engage. Thirdly, the focus on the child's learning process makes it possible to implement self-learning strategies. All of these strategies (peer tutoring, working groups, flexibility, self-learning) are highly recommended for successful multigrade teaching, as Section 1 showed.

The emphasis on communication, writing and reading comprehension rather than copying also helps create a meaningful context for literacy learning. The use of previous knowledge and the ways in which oral language and literacy are used in the child's context would also contribute to more fruitful literacy learning experiences.

Because the training tends to focus on monograde teaching, however, there is a lack of guidance to help teachers in multigrade schools acknowledge and take advantage of the potential of these teaching and learning strategies. This lack of guidance caused many teachers to decide that such strategies and activities are unsuitable to their actual working conditions and that the traditional approach is more adequate (Montero et al, 2001; Ames, 2001). This is especially observed in literacy instruction (see Chapter 6).

3.4. Resources for learning

New educational materials (e.g., workbooks, classroom libraries) have been designed, produced, and distributed among primary schools as part of the reform. This contrasts greatly with past years, when the poverty of schools was reflected in the lack of such resources, especially in multigrade schools. Moreover, as the development of multigrade teaching strategies has shown (see Section 1), the need for educational materials is even more important in such classrooms, as teachers must deal with different activities and grades at the same time and require resources for this.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the policy behind the distribution of educational materials and the kinds of materials produced. Some authors studying current reforms in Latin America (Villegas-Reimers and Reimers, 1996; Braslavsky and Cosse, 1997) point out that the production and distribution of educational materials is sometimes seen as an alternative to improving the quality of teaching. Thus educational materials could replace and cover up the problems of inadequate teacher training that characterise developing countries. Teachers are the central actors in educational reform, however, and they ultimately determine the use of materials (Villegas-Reimers and Reimers,1996; see also Dyer, 2000 for a similar example in India).

Regarding the type of materials produced, it must be noted that some, such as workbooks, were designed for a monograde classroom; for many teachers it is difficult to work with several workbooks at the same time (Ames, 2001). Although not impossible, it involves careful planning based on thorough knowledge of the content, structure and use of such workbooks.

Unfortunately, many teachers lack such knowledge, and workbooks are usually distributed without training sessions for teachers. The lack of training in the use of educational materials also has a negative effect on the use of classroom libraries and specific materials (Ames, 2001). Finally, several multigrade projects call for the development of non-graded educational materials that can be used more easily in multigrade settings, so that children in different grades can engage in the same activity together.

3.5. The place of previous knowledge and context in the learning process

The constructivist approaches' strong acknowledgement of the importance of children's social and cultural context in the learning process represents a further possibility for multigrade settings, as literature in the field of multigrade methodology suggests (NWREL, 2001; Schiefelbein, 1993). As in many countries, most multigrade schools in Peru are located in rural areas, where cultural and social diversity is the norm. In Peru over the years, however, a centralised national curriculum has been designed based on contents and strategies that favour the experience of urban and coastal groups. Children from different backgrounds face contents that are unfamiliar to them and far from their experiences. This represents a handicap for such groups, because opportunities are not provided on an equal basis for engagement with meaningful learning activities.

The curricular diversification promoted by the NEP implies a good opportunity for providing children in multigrade schools with learning experiences based on their previous knowledge. This provides a more meaningful framework for the children's learning, upon which new knowledge can be developed. Literacy learning also benefits, because children can build on the many uses and purposes that language and literacy have in their communities. As the Basic Curricular Structure states:

> "When children work only with letters, syllables or isolated words, they demonstrate several difficulties in understanding the meaning of written language. Therefore it is necessary that *the school use the same forms of reading and writing that the children encounter in daily life.*" (MED, 2000: 34, my emphasis)

Nevertheless, curricular diversification and the recognition of daily uses of literacy are not easy. The current state of affairs shows that the structure and logic behind this process is not working. The normative framework for diversification is presented in Table 3.1. It shows that the process of curriculum diversification is facilitated at several levels, ranging from a national curriculum through regional guidance to be complemented at school level by the head teacher and other teachers before being applied in the classroom.

Table 3.1. Levels of curriculum construction

Responsible entity		Level
DINEIP[21]	Basic Curricular Structure	
DRE[22]	Regional guidance for diversification	Normative
DIR C.E[23]	Institutional Development Project	
Teachers' assembly	Curricular project for school	
Classroom' teachers	Curricular programme in classroom	Operative
	Long term: annual programme	
	Short term: Learning Units / Learning projects / Learning modules	

Prepared by DINEIP. Source: BCS, MED, 2000a: 90

In most schools, however, there is still a wide gap between the Basic Curricular Structure and the classroom teacher's curricular planning. None of the regional offices have provided guidance for diversification. Institutional development projects and school curricular projects have been developed in a few urban schools, but rarely in rural areas. Therefore the classroom teacher has only the Basic Curricular Structure as a resource for planning educational activities, and is left alone to deal with diversification, context, curricular planning and multigrade strategies.

The problem is not just the enormous workload that this implies for teachers or the inadequate support for the task, but that many teachers cannot identify valuable knowledge among cultural and social groups that have been socially constructed as deprived and impoverished. When the social backgrounds, culture and social status of teachers, parents and students differ, a devaluing

[21] National Office of Primary and Preschool Education
[22] Regional Education Office
[23] Head Teacher's Office

of the children's context is common. This prevents teachers from realising the potentials and benefits of local context, knowledge, language and literacy (Ames, 2001, 1999; see also Chapter 6).

4. How Peruvian multigrade schools operate: a look at the schools

The current reform also faces several challenges in improving quality in multigrade schools. These include the material conditions in which multigrade schools operate, the irregularity of school time and organisational arrangements, and the isolation of schools, villages and teachers, which impose restrictions in this process. Eight small case studies conducted in the area chosen[24] provide ample illustration of the general conditions in which multigrade schools operate and the restrictions teachers face.

4.1. Material conditions

Multigrade schools have severe deficiencies in infrastructure, access to services, availability of classroom furniture and equipment, and teaching materials. The school in Puerto Rico provided a vivid example, although it was not the only one. It consisted of only a palm roof covering a cluster of desks, divided into two groups by a fragile palm wall (see pictures in the next page[25]). One side of the school building was without a wall, leaving the building open. This made it impossible to have permanent displays, as they could easily be damaged or stolen. On rainy days, lessons were suspended because the roof leaked. Other multigrade schools in the area have also precarious infrastructure. This has an obvious impact on the kind of learning activities that can be implemented. For example, grouping is not possible because of small classroom size and inadequate furniture. Other schools have more space but no internal walls, and noise produced by other grades distracts children. Educational materials have been distributed to all of these schools during recent years, but some are in storage and their overall use is limited.

[24] See Appendix 2, table 2.1. See also Chapter 2.
[25] Parents and children gave their permission to include the pictures of children that appear in this thesis through the local priest.

Photographs of selected schools in Ucayali

Puerto Rico' School

Puerto Aurora' school and Santa Luz' school

Alfonso Ugarte' school

San Antonio Viejo' school

4.2. Isolation

Teachers in these schools must travel for several hours at the beginning of the week to reach their schools. Because of the distance from their homes, they stay in the school during the week. This is difficult for them, as they live under precarious conditions (no electricity, purified water, furniture or adequate space in which to prepare lessons or cook) far away from their families. Few incentives are provided to rural teachers (who receive a bonus of only $13 per month), although they face more personal difficulties on the job than their urban colleagues and must sometimes pay more for transportation to their workplaces. This has an impact on teacher motivation, as they often feel isolated from their families and the living conditions they enjoyed in the city.

Because of the isolation of villages and schools, visits by specialists and supervisors from central and regional offices are limited. The few visits reported tend to be administrative (i.e., to check children's enrolment) rather than pedagogic. Teachers also feel that their isolation prevents them from attending training courses, causing them to fall behind in their professional training in comparison with their urban colleagues. When they do attend training courses, however, this complicates the normal functioning of the school.

4.3. Irregularity of school time

The number of hours that children in rural multigrade schools spend on school lessons is substantially less than that of their urban peers. The Ministry of Education has estimated that children in rural schools spent 250 hours per year in classroom activities, compared to 500 to 600 hours for urban students and far below the 1,000 hours required by the school system (MED, 2002: 11). This is due to several factors.

Some hours are usually lost at the beginning and at the end of the week, when teachers travel to or from the community by public transportation, which

does not necessarily coincide with school schedules. At the end of the month, the school is closed for at least two days so that teachers can go to the city to receive their paycheques. Public and school holidays are also frequent, and schools cancel classes to participate in local festivities. In the area of this study, because of geographic conditions, the school year usually begins a month after the official date.

Many times restrictions come from the school system itself. Teachers assigned to the school are sometimes contracted after the school year begins.[26] The bureaucratic demands of regional offices, which require that various documents be presented during the year, mean that head teachers must make several trips to the city and spend time there during school days, because administrative offices are closed at weekends. Finally, compulsory training courses offered in the city take teachers out of the school for several days. As a result of these bureaucratic demands and delays, national, regional and local festivities, and teachers' personal situations, the number of regular school days is greatly reduced. One of the conditions characterising multigrade schools, therefore, is the reduced number of school days in comparison with the official schedule for the school year.

4.4. Irregularity of organisational arrangements

In all multigrade schools in Peru, the head teacher is also a classroom teacher. When the head teacher is absent, which occurs frequently, as explained above, his or her classroom has no teacher. A one-teacher school must close, but in a two- or three-teacher school, the students are taken by another teacher or split between two teachers. In these cases, teachers who usually teach two grades are suddenly faced with three, four or six. The same thing happens when a classroom teacher is absent. This suggests that the prevalence of multigrade classrooms could be higher, at least on a temporary basis, than statistics indicate, since they are based on the number of grades

[26] Two months later, in the case of one teacher at San Antonio school.

and teachers per school, but do not consider the movement of students when their teacher is not present.[27]

The redistribution of students and grade groups among teachers was also observed in other situations. Delayed appointment of teachers, for example, meant that other teachers had to attend more grades; the same occurred if a teacher was removed from a school in the middle of the year because of low enrolment. Children were usually taught by more than one teacher during the year. The number of teachers per school, and the teachers themselves, also changed from one year to another.

Organisational arrangements in multigrade schools, therefore, are constantly changing during the year and from year to year. This could cause several difficulties for the children's learning process, because the programme may be interrupted temporarily or permanently when students are split up among other classrooms or get a new teacher.

The general conditions in which multigrade schools operate in the area studied are similar to those in other parts of Peru (see Montero et al, 2001). These conditions pose serious problems for the quality of education at these schools. Facing poor material conditions, isolation and lack of support and specialised training, teachers at multigrade schools must deal with a situation for which they are not prepared. They must do this in a context of poverty that characterises not only schools, but also the rural villages: 66% of the rural population is poor and 36% lives in extreme poverty (CUANTO, 1997). The time available for teaching and learning is more limited in these schools, because of the factors explained above. Improvement of multigrade schools, therefore, must address various elements, from material conditions to adequate training, from a reconsideration of demands and support from regional offices to the need for incentives to enhance motivation among multigrade teachers who face difficult working conditions.

[27] This also suggests that in similar situations in some monograde schools, teachers must also cope with multigrade classrooms.

5. Conclusion: The current reform and multigrade schools

The current situation of the Peruvian school system is characterised by transition and change. There is a new curriculum, new concepts of teaching and learning, and new concepts of literacy and literacy learning. This chapter has examined how the current reform in Peru has offered possibilities for improving multigrade teaching, such as: a) the introduction of curricular programmes by cycle instead by grade, which could help curricular planning in multigrade classrooms; b) a call for child-centred pedagogy that facilitates the use of self-learning strategies; c) the recognition of peers as resources of learning, promoting peer-tutoring and group work; d) the use of active learning strategies that promote flexibility in the use of different activities; e) the provision of educational materials that can be useful resources for learning activities; f) the provision of in-service teacher training to update teachers in new pedagogical approaches and strategies; and g) the recognition of the importance of children' cultural and social context in the learning process, which allows the design of meaningful learning activities for children of diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

The identification of these possibilities arises from what successful multigrade experiences have identified as key components in enhancing the potential of multigrade classrooms. Many of the multigrade teaching strategies found elsewhere can be developed under the pedagogical model that the Peruvian reform proposes. To take advantage of these opportunities for improving multigrade schools, however, explicit attention must be given to the needs of multigrade schools and the social and cultural context in which they operate. In the current reform, however, we see that there is no special training for teachers in multigrade methodology (either pre-service or in-service training), no materials specially designed for multigrade classrooms, and no support system to help teachers in isolated villages. Similarly, little attention is paid to the social and cultural context of multigrade schools. The pedagogical approach promoted by the reform must be tailored to rural children's particular classroom situation — multigrade — and the context in which it operates.

The opportunities that the reform offers for multigrade teaching also pose several problems, as this chapter has shown. The main one is related to the lack of appropriate adaptation and guidance for using the new curriculum, teaching and learning strategies and learning resources in multigrade classrooms. Teachers have also had limited in-service training in the NEP and are still confused by the new terminology, new forms of curriculum planning, and new teaching and learning strategies. They have not had the opportunity to participate in the design of the reform, which has been implemented through a top-down model. Many of the situations that teachers face daily in multigrade classrooms, therefore, have received little attention from educational planners. Multigrade schools also face several problems related to the material conditions under which they operate, as well as their isolation and the irregularity of time and organisational arrangements that characterise them. These factors affect the educational process and teachers' motivation to implement changes.

Finally, teachers come to multigrade schools with training designed for the monograde classroom rather than a multigrade teaching strategy. This makes it more difficult for them to identify the potentials of multigrade classrooms as educational environments. It is necessary to make a distinction between the two concepts. ***Multigrade schools*** are a "de facto" situation in Peru, particularly in rural schools, because of the number of students and budgetary restrictions that impede the assignment of more teachers. ***Multigrade teaching***, on the other hand, could be defined as an educational strategy tailored to the needs of multi-age and multi-grade classrooms. This distinction makes it possible to conclude that the Peruvian school system, despite its large proportion of multigrade schools, lacks a multigrade teaching strategy for teachers in those schools.

The task of developing effective multigrade teaching is more difficult, therefore, and remains exclusively in the teachers' hands. Because there is increasing awareness of these needs in the school system, it is time to examine the ways in which teachers have coped with the situation. As this study will show (see Chapter 6), teachers are very active in creating ways of managing multigrade classrooms, despite the lack of support, resources and

information from the school system. An analysis of their practices and the context in which they work could reveal the resources they use and the areas in which they need further support. This study follows that direction, focusing on the literacy learning process in multigrade classrooms and its immediate social context. The need to address the social context is central to current innovations, to identify previous knowledge and facilitate curricular diversification. It is also important to know the values, meanings and practices that could sustain children's literacy learning beyond school. The next chapter is dedicated to the community and the subsequent one to the home, before to analyse the school itself.

CHAPTER 4:

COMMUNITY LITERACY PRACTICES: FROM NATIONAL TO LOCAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This chapter explores literacy practices in the community of San Antonio. To understand the uses, purposes and meanings of literacy for the members of one community, however, the historical and social context in which they take place deserves special attention. Therefore, the first section of this chapter places literacy in the broader context of colonialism and dominance in which it was introduced in Peru and the 20th-century changes that led to the expansion of literacy and schooling as part of the modernization of Peruvian society. Both processes have had an impact on the meanings of literacy for rural villages, which has mainly been studied in the Andes. The history and characteristics of literacy in the Amazon has received less attention. Section 2 examines this history and places the case in this specific context.

The second part of the chapter (sections 3, 4 and 5) focuses on the community, showing that, despite the usual characterization of rural villages as non-literate environments, it is possible to trace the presence of literacy and its important role in people's daily lives. Through an analysis of the uses of literacy in the village and the meanings and values attached to it, it is possible to see how the region's social diversity and the historical processes that shaped the relationship with the written word in Peruvian society have also shaped current literacy practices among villagers, as well as how villagers are actively involved in the creation and recreation of these practices.

1. Literacy, schooling and power in Peruvian society

Literacy appeared in Peru and Latin America in the context of Spanish colonialism during the 16th century. The context of its arrival stamped particular meanings on the written word. Literacy became the representation of authority, dominance and power among Andean population (Cornejo Polar, 1994; Degregori, 1989, 1991; Lienhard, 1992). The written word was central to the establishment of a new administrative order in the conquered territory.

Written documents were used to impose new rights over indigenous people's lands and the native labour force, new taxes and even a new religion.

European literacy, therefore, had political, religious and administrative functions when it arrived in Latin America, becoming a central element of colonial dominance. This led to a process that marginalized indigenous writing and oral communication (Lienhard, 1992).[28] In doing so, it excluded the majority of the population from the system imposed as the only means of official communication.

Although in this context literacy might initially have been perceived by the indigenous population as a trauma, it was quickly appropriated by indigenous elites. Documents from the 16th and 17th centuries show that literacy was also used as a weapon against oppressors, as a means of communicating on equal terms (Lienhard, 1992:57-59) and reconfiguring the position of indigenous elites in the new colonial order (Hanks, 1987).

Nevertheless, access to literacy was restricted to Spanish, *criollo*[29] and indigenous elites throughout the period of colonial rule. When the indigenous aristocracy disappeared (1780), the indigenous population's access to literacy was extremely restricted until the end of colonial rule and even during the republican period that followed (Degregori, 1998).

Indeed, after independence (1824) indigenous and peasant groups remained largely subordinated. The power of dominant groups was embodied in written documents that disregarded indigenous land rights and favoured the interests of local landlords (Zavala, 2001; Degregori,1991).

Historical processes influenced literacy's symbolic meanings and values. Mistrust of and desire for the written word (Vergara, 1990) or the perception of literacy and schools as strange and menacing (Ortiz, 1971) appear in some myths, showing the ambiguous nature of literacy for Andean people. Literacy represented the knowledge and power of dominant groups, acquiring it,

[28] Before Europeans arrived, graphic systems in Latin America differed in many ways from western and alphabetical literacy (Lienhard, 1992). Discussion of them is beyond the scope of this work, which is dedicated to alphabetic literacy. For more discussion, see Salomon (2001) and Arnold and Yapita (2000).
[29] Descendants of Spaniards born in America.

therefore, is desirable. At the same time, acquiring literacy implied a transit to another culture and language, and thus a threat to indigenous culture. There were radical changes in access to literacy and schooling during the 20th century, however, and new symbolic meanings appeared among the Andean population.

Modernization, schooling and the school myth

At the beginning of the 20th century, Peruvian society became attracted to the idea of modernisation. The changes undertaken were closely related to the consolidation of a new political and social order as a Nation State and the ideology of progress and nationalism prevalent in western countries in the 19th century. This process was accompanied by the introduction of mass schooling systems and compulsory attendance. A national school system was seen as an imperative for forming the new kind of citizen demanded by the new society (Boli and Ramirez, 1992; Meyer, Ramirez and Soysal, 1992).

Within this global context, Peruvian political elites considered the spread of education to be the main tool for "civilising" the indigenous and peasant population to incorporate them into the nation and achieve national development. Schooling and literacy were expanded beyond cities and provincial or district capitals (Contreras, 1996). Communities, peasants, parents, teachers and local landlords responded actively to the State's proposals, appropriating, rejecting or transforming them (Ames, 2002). By the mid-20th century, peasant groups were demanding schooling and literacy, fighting to guarantee their right to education. New symbolic meanings related to schooling and literacy were closely linked with this move.

Several authors (Montoya, 1979, 1980, 1990; Degregori, 1986, 1989, 1991; Ansión, 1986, 1989) have noted a transition towards the appropriation of the written word by the Andean population, in contrast with the fear and mistrust reflected in myth (Ortiz,1971; Vergara, 1990). This transition was related to a broader quest by the rural population for economic and social progress, in which literacy would enable them to defend their land rights and get paid jobs in the city, and give them upward mobility in the social structure and social recognition as citizens.

The emergence of the "contemporary school myth" (Montoya, 1980, 1990) testifies to this transition. In this myth, Spanish language and literacy, and the school as the means for acquiring them, are associated with the world of daylight, with the possibility of having "eyes," of seeing, of being in the light and of progress. Indigenous culture and illiteracy are seen as the world of night, darkness, blindness and backwardness. In the concept of the Andean people then, school literacy became a necessary tool for overcoming poverty and subordination.

The shift towards the new view of literacy emphasised by these studies can be related to a broader modernist narrative that seeks signs of linear change and progress among social groups (Castillo, 2002). The development of literacy, however, is not necessarily linear and clear, as Graff (1987b) shows in addressing the ambiguities of literacy for working class groups in the 20th century. Indeed, as we have noted, since its appearance in Peru, literacy was conceived as both a tool of dominance and a weapon against oppression. People have viewed it with mistrust, but have also desired it. More than a transition from one view to another, this constant ambivalence appears to characterise the relationship with literacy from the 16th century to the 20th. The desire to acquire literacy, however, gained considerable ground among the Andean population, influenced by other social and political factors, such as the expansion of the mass schooling system, the modernization and democratisation of Peruvian society and market demands for a more trained (literate) labour force.

It this context, public schooling in Peru expanded quickly in the second half of the 20th century, especially during 1960s and 1970s.[30] The population of students between ages 6 and 23 grew from 40.6% in 1960 to 73.8% in 1980 (Degregori,1991). By the end of the 1990s, 94.5% of the population between ages 6 and 11 was enrolled in primary school (MED, 2001).

[30] In this sense, Peru follows a worldwide trend. As Meyer, Ramirez and Soysal (1992) show from data from 120 countries, "the growth in enrolment was around 5% per decade before 1940 and more than doubled after World War II, to around 12% per decade" (140). They explain the expansion of a mass schooling system worldwide as a result of the intensification of the nation-state principle (which become hegemonic) and the increased centrality of mass education within the model of nation state.

Despite the expansion of the mass schooling system and the associated democratisation of literacy, literacy is still a basic element of differentiation and subordination in Peruvian society (Nugent, 1996). Even when new, more participatory means of communication such as audio-visual ones, appeared, neutralizing the exclusive force of literacy, literacy "still has an extraordinary force to explain many of the asymmetries in social spaces for the exercising of authority" (Nugent, 1996:32). Nugent calls this literacy of dominance the "thin power," especially in relation to its political and administrative functions, using this metaphor to highlight the power that "papers" or written documents have in Peruvian society.

Most studies from the social sciences about literacy and schooling in Peruvian society have focused on the Andean region. More recently, however, some studies (Aikman, 1999; Ansión et al., 1998; Ames, 2002) have begun to explore the meanings and functions of literacy and education among other groups in the country. The high value attributed to literacy and its importance as a tool for self-defence, is found not only in the Andes, but also in urban areas (Ansión et al., 1998) and among indigenous groups in the Amazon (Aikman, 1999; Ames, 2002). These studies have shown, however, that visions and values related to literacy and education can vary depending on the history of each social and cultural group and the ways in which each appropriates literacy. The particularities of each group, therefore, must be taken into account in any case study. The next section examines the particular characteristics of the Amazon region, where the study was carried out.

As in other parts of the world, the context in which literacy arrived and was disseminated contributed to the formation of a shared view in Peru: People have internalised a dominant discourse that identifies illiteracy with poverty and exclusion. This clearly shows that literacy is not a value-free, neutral skill. On the contrary, its values and meanings have been strongly shaped by historical, political and social processes.

2. Ucayali and the Amazon

The Amazon followed a different path in its relationship with the nation state and the pace and extent to which literacy entered into it. The region's topography and the indigenous population's scattered, itinerant settlement patterns set constraints on effective control of the territory. As a result, the region's integration into the nation was much more fragile until the mid-20th century. It was then that social and political processes led to a more intense expansion of the market economy into the region and a closer relationship with the rest of the country. This section presents the history of the region, with particular attention to Ucayali, the department in which San Antonio is located and to the village itself. This will make it possible to understand the population's current diversity, its origins, the place of literacy and the different agents who have participated in its dissemination.

2.1. Indigenous people and missionaries

Exploration of the Amazon began with the beginning of the Spanish invasion in the 16th century. The Ucayali River, the landmark that gives its name to the department, was discovered by Spanish explorers in 1557. But the difficult geography, lack of precious metals and permanent cultivated lands and aggressiveness of the indigenous people discouraged the Spaniards from permanently colonising the territory. The region remained isolated from Spanish influence until the mid-17th century, when missionaries began to establish missions for indigenous people in an effort to convert them to Catholicism and establish control over the territory. They were not very successful, however, because of indigenous uprisings and resistance and a lack of resources, which led to the temporary closure of missions and successive attempts to establish new ones (García Jordán, 2001; Cardenas, 1989; GEF/PNUD/UNOPS, 1997).

During the second half of the 19th century, the new Republic stimulated the Catholic Church to play a role in the expansion of internal boundaries, colonisation of the Amazon territory, exploration of trade routes, evangelisation of indigenous people and establishment of permanent towns

with agricultural production (García Jordán, 2001). The contact between indigenous groups and missionaries implied some contact with European writing. As Gow (1990) points out, although missionaries probably did not attempt to teach literacy to indigenous people, the latter must have had considerable exposure to the importance of literacy to Europeans.

The Peruvian State commissioned missions and religious institutions to take charge of basic literacy instruction at least in major towns, as some 19th-century documents show (Larrabure i Correa, 1909).[31] This instruction consisted of "Christian doctrine, reading, counting, Spanish grammar and rules of good behaviour extracted from Sacred Scripture" (Ibid.,: 455).[32]

Much more historical research is needed to determine the role of the Catholic Church in the introduction and dissemination of literacy in the region. Available information shows that the church was one of the first agents to introduce European literacy into the Amazon, in a close relationship first with colonial rulers and later with the Peruvian State. The church also played a role in introducing metal tools and goods of European origin as a strategy for attracting indigenous people to the missions (see Benavides, 1990). This laid the groundwork for relationships established later with other external agents. Indeed, the church, although important, was not the only agent in the region at the end of the 19th century. Parallel processes that expanded the participation of the State and the market began to reshape the region, increasing diversity among the population.

2.2. Promised Land: the colonization of the Amazon

During the 19th century, successive governments approved several laws to promote the colonisation of the Amazon, which was seen as an "empty space" (García Jordan, 2001; Barclay et al 1991). The "Law of Protection of Missions at Ucayali" was approved in 1845, with the goal of "civilising" savage tribes and encouraging trade and industry in the country. The law established that all foreigners and indigenous people who settled in new missions would

[31] See the section on documents for public instruction in Vol. IX, pp. 449-476.
[32] Edict of the Bishop of Mainas to parents, asking them to send their children to the school established in the seminary in Moyobamba (1843).

receive lands to work. With the support of different laws,[33] immigration to the region began, leading to permanent settlement by foreigners with land rights.

In general, colonisation involved new pressures on indigenous labour and lands and new conflicts between different actors in the area (such as missionaries, traders, *patrones* or bosses, and *caucheros* or rubber bosses). Trade goods were central in the relationships of indigenous groups with these actors, and they were used to appropriate an indigenous labour force for extractive activities, estates *(haciendas)* and cattle ranches, as well as for personal services for local authorities, colonists, *patrones* and priests (Gow, 1991). Colonisation also involved the seizure of indigenous lands, which were recognised only when indigenous people live in settled towns, not when they were itinerant.

This process of colonisation and migration to the region intensified with the "rubber boom" (1862-1918), which was marked by the cruel exploitation of the indigenous population throughout the Amazon (Cardenas, 1989). This period represents the clearest example of the way the Amazon was integrated into the national and global economies: through extractive activities that failed to produce a more sustained foundation for internal development.

After the rubber boom, the region turned into agricultural production while continuing with extractive activities (wood, petroleum, and other natural products). Nevertheless, the region was relatively isolated from the rest of the country until 1940, when its strategic importance became apparent again and the Peruvian State showed renewed interest in its integration. This was due to different political and economic factors, including the region's geopolitical importance in terms of boundaries and conflicts with neighbouring countries, a favourable international economic climate (WWII and the demand for rubber)

[33] Between 1822 and 1893, several laws were approved to stimulate colonisation of the Amazon: A law passed in 1822 made it possible for anyone to claim lands in eastern territories if they promised to work it, while a 1828 measure gave immigrants property rights. In 1832, a law regulating colonization of the Amazon established that land would be provided to foreigners (García Jordán, 2001). In 1849 and 1853, laws favouring European immigration to the Amazon were approved. In 1865, the provisions of the law for colonisation in Ucayali (1845) were extended for 20 more years. In 1868, a new law was passed encouraging Peruvians and foreigners to settle in the Amazon. In 1872, the European Immigration Society was created. Another law that encouraged European immigration to the Amazon was approved in 1893 (GEF/UNDP/UNOPS, 1997; García Jordán, 2001).

and internal factors such as the need for lands and changes in development pattern's in the country (Barclay et al 1991). With the establishment of new colonisation efforts, the Amazon was seen as the alternative to agrarian reform (Ibid.). The Pucallpa-Lima highway was built in 1942, establishing a direct link between the capital and Ucayali and more enduring trade and migration between the region and the rest of the country.

Since then, the State's presence in the region has increased, along with that of economic agents ranging from commercial traders to landowners, from the timber industry to oil companies. New central government policies placed greater emphasis on investment in economic infrastructure and services to ensure ongoing development and integration while providing an incentive for colonization. This was also an intensive period of expansion of schooling in the region. In 1945, because of the Catholic Church's apparent failure in making indigenous groups literate, the government allowed a Protestant institution, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), to carry out a massive expansion of bilingual schools in indigenous villages. The presence of schools led to the establishment of more permanent villages by indigenous people, who traditionally had a nomadic lifestyle (Dans, 1975; Gow, 1991). The Law of Native Communities (1975) consolidated this process, giving indigenous communities land rights to delimited territories.

New actors also appeared on scene during the 1980s and 1990s, when coca crops became widespread and drug trafficking began in the area. Subversive groups such as Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA, which were staging military insurrections against the State, also gained a foothold in the area. Both processes brought violence from the subversive groups and a repressive response by the State. By the end of the 1990s, however, both groups were virtually defeated and drug trafficking had declined. The State regained its presence, which had been restricted and threatened during the years of violence, and once more faced the need to integrate the region and its population.

From the mid-19th through the 20th century, the region faced dramatic changes and the growth and diversification of its population. Indigenous

groups inhabiting the Amazon shared their space with outsiders of different origins. Over the years, the foreign population that had settled in the area during the 19th and 20th centuries mixed with indigenous people. They differentiate themselves from indigenous groups that remain in the region, calling themselves *"mestizos"* (also identified in the literature as *"ribereños"*), forming a group of non-tribal peasantry living near the rivers. More recent immigrants who have arrived in the region since the 1940s, mainly from the Andean zone, formed another group, *"colonos,"* with distinctive characteristics from their places of origin (Chirif, 1991). Nevertheless, social and ethnic identities in the area are far more complex than this broad typology suggest (see Gow, 1991). It helps to trace the origin of *mestizo* groups and differentiate them broadly from other groups in the region with which they are in constant interaction. *Mestizo* villagers in Ucayali speak a Spanish dialect different from Andean and coastal Spanish and represents the complex history of relations between the native and outsider population (Gow, 1991).[34]

The region's diverse social and cultural composition is important in understanding the meanings that literacy acquires among the *mestizo* population, as will be shown later, since literacy plays also a role in their relationships with other groups and agents in the region.

This section has traced the region's history, describing its distinctive characteristics and the church's early presence as a religious, educational and commercial agent. Other agents involved in the spread of literacy included the State and the market, although they appeared much later (although very intensively) in the Amazon than in other parts of the country. Both the State and the church were directly involved with the spread of literacy for religious and administrative purposes and with the expansion of schools in the region. Commercial trade and extractive activities also made basic literacy and calculation skills necessary tools for people involved in the market economy. The enduring influence of these agents will be appreciated

[34] The Ucayali dialect of Spanish shows the influence of Quechua and native Amazon languages. As Gow (1991) points out, although it differs from other Spanish dialects in lexicon and grammatical aspects, it has not been addressed by academic studies, as my own search also indicates.

when examining the current uses of literacy in one rural village, which is introduced below.

2.3. A *mestizo* village in Ucayali

San Antonio, the *mestizo* village chosen for this study, is located in the Ucayali flood plains. It was founded in 1874, when the region was already being populated by foreigners with the support of colonisation laws issued by the central government. Pucallpa, which is now the region's capital city, was settled at about the same time.

The family names of some of the first village authorities combined Spanish and indigenous names, which suggests that the founders of San Antonio were already *mestizos*, perhaps from missions and towns in nearby provinces or departments in the Amazon, although their precise origins could not be traced.

San Antonio's name and location have been changed four times since its foundation. It was first called San Miguel de Callaria and located on the stream of the same name north of its current location, not far from the mission town of Callaria.[35] At that time, just 38 villagers lived there. A Spanish priest served the village, and the chapel was built the year the community was founded. The location and name were changed in 1904 (San Miguel de Cumanía), 1927 (San Antonio) and 1983 (Nuevo San Antonio) for geographical reasons (changes in the river's course).

Villagers consider all of these settlements to be part of their collective history, showing that despite the fluidity of settlement, people trace their community's continuity over different residential locations. This is not unusual in the region,[36] where traditional settlement patterns were itinerant, allowing more effective use of resources and the environment. The sense of community is

[35] The mission of Callaria, founded in 1859, originated with the relocation of Sarayacu, the most important and longest-standing colonial-era Franciscan mission in the Lower Ucayali. The mission concentrated Panobo, Cocama and Omagua indigenous people. The proximity of Callaria also suggests that the founders were already *mestizos*.

[36] See Gow (1991) for a similar example of how a village remains the same despite relocation.

more firmly attached to the shared place of residence of a group of people than to the village's physical location. San Antonio is formed by a core group of families descended from original founders, as well as by *mestizo* people who have come from other parts of the Amazon.[37] This is common in the region, where internal migration is very high. According to the 1972 national census, 85% of immigrants to Coronel Portillo province (where San Antonio is located) were from the Amazon region (Rodríguez, 1991: 131). Finally, as usual in the region, the village is surrounded by other villages that are inhabited either by *mestizos* or indigenous people (Shipibo), which reflects the ethnic diversity of the area.

Pucallpa, the small village founded some years after San Antonio as a port for trade along the Ucayali, continued to grow. Its strategic location became even more advantageous when the highway was built and it later became the capital of the department (1980). With its 172,286 inhabitants, Pucallpa is now the second largest city in the Amazon (INEI, 1993). Residents of San Antonio have a constant, fluid relationship with this dynamic city for trade, work, services and temporary or permanent migration.

San Antonio now has 304 inhabitants distributed in 50 households. Villagers are mainly dedicated to fishing and agriculture,[38] but are strongly involved in the regional market economy. Fish and agricultural products are sold daily in Pucallpa, and other commodities are bought there, while some agricultural production is for subsistence. Agriculture follows the slash-and-burn pattern common in the region. The *chacras* or gardens belong to the couple in each household, and both work maintaining them. When more workers are needed (i.e. for burning, planting and harvesting), it may be acquired through paid labour (*peones*) or through *mingas*, in which relatives and neighbours work in exchange for drinks and reciprocal labour in their own gardens in the future.

The gardens produce corn, manioc, beans and culinary and medicinal herbs, whilst rice is grown on the river flood plain. Some commercial crops, such as

[37] Especially from the Lower Ucayali, Yurimaguas and Iquitos in Loreto, the Huallaga in San Martin, Pucallpa and the Upper Ucayali; few people come from other areas, such as Huanuco, Junin or Madre de Dios.
[38] Some men also work in logging during rainy season upriver in the Alto Ucayali.

corn and rice, are sold at the city, as are farm animals such as pigs and chickens.[39] The villagers in San Antonio depend heavily on their economic exchange with the city, not only for manufactured products and money, but also for food, since their lands do not allow the cultivation of some products essential to their diet. Fishing is the most important economic activity, because it provides not only food for the family but also money for meeting other needs.

Men fish individually or in pairs, using a canoe and nets (*tarrafa* and *tramperas*) most of the time, either in the nearby lake (*cocha*) or along the riverbanks (see picture next page). Fishermen also conduct expeditions downriver seasonally.[40]

Productive techniques in San Antonio show similarities (i.e. slashing and burning, *mingas*) and differences (i.e. single vs. multiple crops in the same field, fishing techniques) in comparison with indigenous systems of production in the area, reflecting the mixed pattern that a long coexistence with other groups has imprinted on their culture. The same is true in health care, which combines use of the services of the Basic Health Centre with herbal medicine and local experts (*curanderos*). Villagers' conceptions about supernatural and spiritual beings that inhabit the forest, river and lakes also show similarities to those found among indigenous groups.

Basic education seems to have a long history in the village. The oldest villager in San Antonio (born in 1913), a son of one of the founders, reported two years of basic instruction, indicating it was the only educational service available at the time. Currently San Antonio has a pre-school and primary and secondary schools.

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[39] Hunting is not a common activity for villagers, because game is scarce in the forest there. They sometimes hunt animals that are harming their crops or livestock.

[40] Fishing follows the seasonal changes and movement of the fish. During the rainy season (December to April), there are fewer fish in the river and lake, since they spread over all the flooded areas. At the beginning of the dry season, the fish migrate in large groups (*mijano*) in the main river (May to June), and fishermen often mount expeditions in motorboats. During most of the dry season (July to November), however, fish are concentrated in the lake and fishing is done there .

San Antonio: Fishing in the Ucayali

A fisherman driving a canoe in the Ucayali river. San Antonio.

A fisherman from San Antonio selling his fish in Yarinacocha port at sunrise.

Because basic instruction has been provided since very early in the village's history, most of the population has some schooling, as Table 4.1 shows. Although half the adult villagers have completed only part of their primary education, half also have some years of secondary education.

Table 4.1. Years of schooling for villagers over age 15

Years of schooling	Male	Female	Cases	%	Cum %
0	3	3	6	4	4
1-3	7	16	23	15	19
4-6	28	17	45	30	49
7-10	19	17	36	24	73
11 or more	23	17	40	27	100
Total	80	70	150	100	

Source: Population Census, San Antonio, November 2000

Indeed, villagers in San Antonio have more years of schooling than those of other rural villages, and the average number of years of schooling for both men and women is higher than the national average in rural areas (see Table 4.2.)

Table 4.2. Average number of years of schooling for population over age 15

Population over age 15	San Antonio[41]	National Rural[42]	National Urban[43]
Men	7.4	5.1	9.2
Women	6.8	3.7	8.3

The number of years of schooling that villagers have completed has increased over the generations, an upward trend (see Table 4.3) related to the expansion of educational services in the region and the country. Indeed, age groups that attended school after 1960 have more than twice the average number years of schooling than earlier groups, as Table 4.3 show.

[41] Source: Population Census, San Antonio, November 2000
[42] Source: INEI. *Encuesta Nacional de Hogares 1997* (cit. in Montero and Tovar, 1999)
[43] Ibid.

Table 4.3. Years of schooling for population over age 15, by age group[44]

Age group	Number of cases	Average years of schooling
Over 55	24	3
46-55	19	4
36-45	24	7
26-35	31	9
16-25	52	9
Total	**150**	7

Source: Population Census, San Antonio, November 2000

Judging by the villagers' productive activities, San Antonio has a distinctly rural character. Nevertheless, it does not correspond to the stereotype that associates rural villagers with little or no schooling. This suggests the need to avoid generalisations about rural communities, keeping in mind that several changes have occurred in recent years and that the villages' particular histories might produce differences among them. The same is true of literacy, as we will see below.

3. Literacy in a rural community

The history of exclusion of rural populations from literacy has led to a common representation of them as non-literate, even when many changes in the provision of education seem to be changing that situation. This powerful representation is seen as an obstacle for children's learning (see Godenzzi, Flores and Ramirez, 2000). Educational interventions in Peru have tried to address the issue by introducing campaigns for "putting letters in the environment." Some of these efforts, however, impose the school discourse on villagers instead of focusing on the real uses that literacy has or could have in rural villages (see Zavala, 2001b for an analysis of this matter). Instead of assuming *a priori* the absence of literacy in the village, this study looked at the ways it is used by villagers, finding that literacy has multiple uses in local life and complex meanings for rural villagers.

The next sections analyse the data collected, showing the presence of literacy in daily life in San Antonio. First, the presence of literacy in the village is introduced in its more physical and observable trace: the visual environment.

[44] Differences between men and women on average are very small, not exceeding one year in any age group.

Second, the role of literacy in local organisation and public life is highlighted as it is used and perceived by villagers. Third, the uses of literacy appear again when villagers individually approach social services and institutions in and outside the village. Finally, the use of literacy in religious life of villagers is presented by looking at religious events.

3.1. The written landscape in the village

Barton and Hamilton (1998), in their ethnography of literacy in one urban community, state that "attending to (..) visual traces (...) offers us a useful source of information about literacy practices in the community" (43). Indeed, physical traces of literacy in the immediate environment provide a starting-point from which to approach the uses of literacy at the village. This section analyses the written landscape of the village, that is, the presence of written signs that provide information or serve some purpose in public areas. Through this approach, it is possible to show the presence of literacy in the village and some of the main activities with which it is related.

> Once visitors arrive in San Antonio, there is no sign at the port that tell them where they are. As the "highway" in this area is the Ucayali River, there are no signs along the way that indicate the proximity of the village. Only a handful of villages along the river have handmade signs bearing their names.
>
> Despite this first impression, a careful look reveals that there are indeed traces of writing around the village. Although they are less varied and profuse than in the city, an examination of this written landscape could help determine some of the local uses of literacy. Along the main street, handmade signs outside small shops and bars indicate the name of the establishment and/or some of the products sold there. A person entering one of these stores to buy a candy or some rice sees several small-format, coloured, printed advertisements on the walls.
>
> Institutions that provide basic health and educational services also contribute to put letters into the visual environment. They have at least one sign indicating the name or number of the institution, its location and its public nature. Inside these public buildings are printed materials about institutional activities. The same is true in the small Catholic chapel. The community centre has only a couple of posters about fishing and police duties. The latter is probably the only poster that relates literacy to communal activities and decisions. There are also some graffiti on the front wall of a house, with the names of the most famous national soccer teams. During general elections, campaign

posters appeared in the village decorating the front walls or the insides of some houses.

This brief description of the written landscape reveals not only the presence of writing, but also the activities related to it and the presence of other agents in the village: the presence of the market and trade through commercial advertisements and shop signs; the presence of the State and the church through signs identifying their buildings, where public services are provided, and the presence of communal organisation through a written description of some villagers' duties. There is also writing related to entertainment, such as sports graffiti, and messages indicating that the community belongs to a particular state and nation, such as the political campaign posters. The written word is indeed present in this small rural village, connecting it with a broader context but also expressing particular ways in which literacy is used in the village itself.

Written signs are mostly related to commercial activities and public services (health, education): 15 of the 26 written signs found in the community[45] are related to commercial services, nine to public institutions, one to local organisation and one to sports.

Commercial activities are part of daily life in the village. Fishermen and their wives send their fish to be sold in the city every day by the pilot of the public boat; men and women go to the city to find work and sell their products for cash, or to buy items they cannot produce in the village. Children usually participate directly or indirectly in these activities (i.e. joining parents on trips to the market to buy or sell). In the village, children are in charge of shopping for small items for their mothers on a daily basis.

Literacy in the village is also related to public institutions (schools, health centre) that represent the State and its presence among the villagers. In general, the relationship with the State and its public services is mediated by several written documents, as will be show later, and involves mainly adult villagers.

[45] Excluding political campaign posters (which are only temporarily present).

Photographs of the written landscape at the village

"Store Roy Elvis offers you a variety of groceries"

"Lizbeth Bakery. Belong to Juan Pablo"
plus political campaign' poster for national elections (congressman' candidate)

"Bar Store Chelita. Sells Groceries, Drinks, Sweets"

"The great Caiman" (Bar, shop)

"Presidency of the republic. Food for schools' program. Improving our diet. School: 64063. Place: San Antonio Village. Ministry of Woman and Human Development. National program of food assistance."

"Ministry of Health. Health Centre. San Antonio"

"Peruvian Republic. Pre-school No. 48. San Antonio"

Other printed material is also publicly available. Newspapers are not produced in the village, nor do they circulate frequently among the villagers, although they are sometimes bought during a visit to the city, usually by men, who read them on the way home. Once in the village, newspapers can be read by other family members or stored for uses other than reading. They are part of the written landscape, since some pages are used to decorate walls in shops and houses or cover cracks in walls. In the school, photographs and landscapes from newspapers are used as decoration on the walls.

Although there is no electricity in San Antonio, a significant number of families have and use television: 24 of 50 have a television powered by a car battery. People watch television during selected hours to see favourite family programmes, mostly entertainment programmes although some news programmes. Television further introduces the written word into villagers' daily life. Radio (present in 29 households) is the main source of information and is on for much of the day, combining national and regional news programs with music.

Another visual trace of printing in the village is that on objects and clothes. Some clothes have the brand printed in a visible place. Familiar objects, such as buckets for carrying water, were originally containers for some product and bear the printed name. Food containers, such as bags, cans and bottles, are also printed with the product name and instructions. Although this printed matter may be considered unimportant, it is also part of the children's written landscape and social context. In my interaction with children and in their frequent visits to my home, I observed their curiosity and attempts to identify and read labels on different products. They identify some products first by visual clues, sometimes based on what they see on television, as in the case of products not common in the village that they never tried or seen before. After identifying these clues, they attempt to read the labels and instructions. This strongly suggests children' involvement with their literacy environment and the ways in which they experience literacy's forms and functions.

Another clear example arose in an exercise with children in upper grades at school (grades 3 to 6), in which they associated uses of literacy first with

commercial activities, such as selling or buying. Without a teacher that day, the children worked with me on a census of all written posters observable in the village. We walked along the main street in small groups, copying everything written outside houses, shops and public buildings. Once back at the classroom, we put together our results. The activity then was to share what we saw and then to identify the use of written posters. Invariably, children remarked on the commercial use of literacy: to inform about what is sold or that something is for sale.[46] When they worked on a small-group exercise to produce a sign for a given place or service (a school, a hospital, a restaurant, a market), all reproduced the commercial use of posters. Hospital posters, for example, listed medicines sold there, sometimes mixed with illnesses. Restaurant posters include some original names and foods, but basically listed the dishes sold. Market posters also consisted of a list of products usually sold in open markets.[47]

Children's perceptions of the uses and functions of written material in their environment provide insight into the local literacy practices in which they become involved. For children, one strong use of literacy appears to be closely related with commercial activities. As I have mentioned, children are more directly involved in shopping than with public institutions or local organisations. In addition, most printing in the village is related to commercial activities. Printing introduced by media through commercial advertising also reinforces such perceptions of the uses of literacy. All of these factors help explain the emphasis that children place on the commercial uses of literacy. This shows that the written landscape is not marginal to children's experience; rather, they extract from it some of the uses and purposes of literacy in village social life.

This initial approach to the presence of literacy in the village has concentrated on the visual environment. It has shown that literacy is not only present in the children's social landscape, but that they also extract from this landscape and

[46] They also mentioned "help wanted" signs, which are not present in the community but are common in the city, where the children could have seen them.
[47] The school posters were the only ones that could not offer products. After some confusion, attempts to copy the poster outside the school and several questions, the children produced different posters that welcomed visitors, announced activities at the school, and said where the children were from, and what they received (books).

the uses of writing that they see a sense and understanding of the purpose of literacy. This point will be further developed in the next chapter. For now, it is worth noting that literacy appears in very external ways. Now, however, I will examine less visible (at least at first glance) uses of literacy, such as those used by villagers in the context of the community.

3.2. Literacy in the community: local organisation and public life

When establishing the community as an identifiable literacy domain (see Chapter 1), the importance of local organisations in the life of rural villagers and their use of literacy soon arise. In this domain, literacy is mainly used in the context of such organisations. This section discusses these practices and how they convey specific values attached to literacy in community life.

To understand the uses of literacy in the community, the first section introduces the notion of community used in the study and its importance in local life. The second part analyses the intensive use of literacy by local organisations in the community and in relation to external institutions. This involves the production and management of different kind of documents by villagers and, especially, their representatives. Uses of literacy also revealed personal plans within the village and commitment to it: literacy is seen as an important tool for assuming a position of authority in the village and, therefore, "serving it," as villagers said. Nevertheless, access to positions of authority and related literacy practices appear confined to male villagers, suggesting a gender-related pattern in the use of literacy. These issues are discussed in this section before we turn to more individual uses of literacy.

3.2.1. The notion of community.

Initially, the notion of community considered in this study was defined in geographical, cultural and social terms. In geographical terms, it refers to a village constituted by a group of families in a defined territory. In social terms, it refers to a group of families living in such village, who are mainly dedicated to rural activities, such as fishing and agriculture. In cultural terms, the community is *mestizo*, as distinct from indigenous.

In this sense, the notion of community that guides this study "refers to the realm of 'local social relations' which mediates between the private sphere of family and household and the public sphere of impersonal, formal organisation" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:15-16). Local organisation of the community as a group of families living together has particular importance in the lives of San Antonio's people.

The people of San Antonio are organised in a Communal Assembly, made up of all "citizens" of the village, as they call every adult over 18 years old. When the citizen is married, however, representation, duties and rights are exercised on a family basis. Every two years, the communal assembly elects a Community Board, which has a president, vice president, secretary and a treasurer. The assembly and board constitute the village's most important social organisation and the board represents the village before other public entities.[48]

The presence of this local organisation is very strong. The Communal Assembly meets monthly and all families attend. This body is useful in addressing the needs and problems of the families of San Antonio, such as the maintenance of paths in the village and those leading to the port and other villages, as well as the sports field and cemetery; organisation of the village's annual festival and other special events; the regulation of informal trade during sports festivals; the establishment of norms regulating village life and internal order; and the commercialisation (buying or selling) of community resources. There are also other forms of social organisation with specific purposes, such as sports clubs, the Mothers' Club and "Glass of Milk" Committee (the latter two receive food from municipal or state agencies as part of social programmes), and the Parent's Associations (APAFA) of the three levels of the educational system present at the village (pre-school, primary and secondary).

Therefore, the village's social organisation is revealed as an additional dimension of the notion of community, in that it involves particular activities

[48] There are other political authorities, such as the municipal agent and lieutenant governor, who represent municipal and state authority, respectively.

related to public and local life and the village as a social and political entity. It also becomes quite important for this research, because local organisations are spaces in which literacy is intensively used in a particular way and with particular meanings, as we will see below.

3.2.2. Literacy and local organisation

The community as defined above constitutes an identifiable literacy domain. Particular literacy events take place as part of communal activities. Local organisations constitute the main place where villagers use literacy to manage collective needs and daily life. They cope with the different kinds of documents required to obtain state support through goods, services or whatever else is needed at the community level.

Indeed, there is a strong paper-mediated relationship between the Peruvian State and its citizens. Although some studies have highlighted this characteristic of Peruvian society (Nugent, 1996; Lund, 2001), they have concentrated on the relationship between individual citizens and the State. When we look at the community as a social and political entity, however, it is possible to see that this also applies to groups of citizens, such as those organised in rural villages. The people of San Antonio are quite aware of the importance of this institutional dimension of literacy, which places them in a relationship with the State and its institutions, as well as other external agents (i.e., the municipality, neighbouring villages).

A first example of the use of literacy is the written account of all communal assemblies in the book of minutes (*Libro de actas*). Every local organisation has its own book of minutes, in which every session is documented with agreements reached, complaints and reports. A written record of every session and all agreements gives them both formality and legitimacy. As the people of San Antonio say, "papers speak."[49] This means that what is recorded on paper is enduring and becomes proof. All participants at the assembly must sign or put a fingerprint on the minutes to confirm their participation and their agreement with decisions taken.

[49] This is also a popular expression not only in San Antonio but in the whole country.

Reading is also involved in organisational meetings, which always start with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting. Often, reports, official letters and financial statements are also read.

Many organisations and institutions throughout the country follow this pattern, in both rural and urban settings. The practice has, no doubt, bureaucratic origins and functions. Indeed, state agencies require that the book of minutes be submitted for several administrative procedures (e.g., recognition of appointed representatives).

In general, the relationship between the village and public institutions, either when requesting something (services, goods), issuing an invitation to some event, or seeking recognition for representatives, organisations, land rights, etc., is always mediated by written documents. Besides minutes books, interviews and observation show a wide range of written documents produced as part of literacy activities in local organisations and related to public life: official letters, letters, requests, communiqués, summonses, receipts, memorials, etc. Each type of document serves a different purpose, and local representatives are quite aware of the functions of each.[50]

The bureaucratic functions of these literacy practices could lead to an identification of them as imposed literacy, meaning one in which the style and range of allowable content is dictated by social (external) institutions (Ivanic and Moss, 1991). In this sense, it would be opposed to self-generated literacy, which stems from a person's own needs, interest and purposes, in which the person is free to adopt his or her own content and styles (Ibid.). Although this distinction is useful in tracing the origins of certain community literacy practices and the importance of external agents in enforcing them (such as the State), there is not always a clear distinction between them.

In San Antonio, although much of the literacy activity carried out by local organisations could be considered imposed through requirements established externally by State bureaucracy, it also serves local uses and purposes. The

[50] Official letters, for example, are used to communicate with public institutions or other villages. Summonses are used inside the village, to call a citizen to appear before the authorities when a complaint is made about his or her behaviour. Receipts are used inside and outside the village to document a purchase or expenditure.

frontier between imposed and self-generated literacy therefore appears much more complex and difficult to trace with clarity.

The organisation of the annual festival (celebrating the town's anniversary) in June 2001 may provide an example. The festival was only of local interest and was organised by villagers. It was planned, carried out and evaluated through the Communal Assembly. Each villager assumed a duty as part of a certain committee and contributed to the festival (with money, chickens or alcoholic beverages). The assembly followed up each villager's participation with a written registry in which the treasurer put marks next to the villagers' names when contributions were made. The few debtors were compelled to pay the assembly.

Several written documents were also produced in occasion of the festival. Official letters were sent to invite village authorities (head teachers, priest and nurse) to participate and collaborate by assuming duties and making contributions. Official letters were also sent to other villages to invite them to the festival and sports championship. A programme of the one-week celebration was written up to be read to the assembly and copied on large sheets of paper to be posted on walls along the main street.

All these literacy activities were self-generated by representatives and villagers, not because of an imposed requirement, but as part of their own need to organise, follow up and communicate their activities. The use of written documents gives formality to the festival's organisation and seems to highlight the importance of the festivity itself. So while villagers used written documents similar to those used in their relationship with external institutions (an imposed literacy), they did so to organise an internal event whose purposes were self-generated. This act implies not only a simple transference from bureaucratic to local uses, but in using literacy in this way, villagers recreate the use of written documents from external demands to internal needs.

Similar self-generated literacy practices occur on a more regular basis. During the dry season, every two weeks there is a communal task (*faena*) whose purpose is to meet practical village needs (e.g., to clear paths or the sports

field). At least one member of each family must participate in these tasks. An attendance list is kept, and those who are absent receive a penalty. Literacy is used here to organise and keep an account of communal labour.

This seems to be a common practice in Peruvian rural communities. Salomon (2003, 1997), in his studies among Andean communities, highlights the use of literacy for internal purposes of community accounting and the organisation of the communal labour force.[51] Although his study draws upon a broader range of activities related to production, the examples above show how literacy is used for these same purposes in San Antonio.

Literacy practices in local organisations, therefore, seem to blend imposed and self-generated literacy. Since the purpose of these organisations is to represent the community or various groups inside it in their relations with external institutions, they use literacy in the ways required by such institutions. They also actively appropriate this literacy for self-generated purposes. Moreover, local organisations also develop the use of literacy for an accounting of communal organisation and labour (i.e. *faenas*) and the internal organisation of the village (i.e. regulations).

The ways in which literacy is used in the community are closely related to local organisations and with the community's relationships with public institutions and other villages. Literacy practices are marked by institutional requirements, but literacy is also used for internal purposes. It therefore contributes to the organisation of daily life in the village, both for external relationships and internal arrangements. Literacy in the community domain is more observable among adults, who participate in public life, in collective organisations and in interaction with public institutions[52]. This use of literacy also shapes some of the meanings that villagers confer on it.

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[51] Salomon (1997, 2001) goes further, pointing out similarities between the contents and functions of minutes books and other communal documents and those of ancient *khipus* (a pre-Hispanic graphic and mnemonic system used in the past in the communities he studied).

[52] Children are sometimes present at these meetings, but they are not direct participants and play whilst their parents attend the meeting. For children, therefore, the institutional dimension of literacy is part of adult life, but they do not feel as involved in it as they are in its commercial uses.

3.2.3. To serve the village: literacy as personal and collective resource

Uses of literacy are intertwined with the values attached to it. Literacy is not only used in public spheres of life, such as local organisations, but it is also seen as tool for villagers' social and public participation. When asked why it would be useful to become literate, villagers said it would enable their children to become authorities or representatives in the village. In this way, they would "serve" the village.

The notion of "service" was recurrent in interviews. Villagers emphasise this dimension when referring to positions of community authority and representation. As Mr. Wilson said, referring to the importance of education for community life:

> "(Children, when they become adults) have to be useful, to work for the village or any place they will be (...) I tell my children that a person cannot live in a village for fun; one must serve truly, with love for our town"[53].

For Mr. Wilson, literacy is a necessary tool for being a useful member of the community, to serve "truly" and "with love." Mr. Roberto[54] also emphasised that holding such a position is a "service" when he pointed out that authorities do not receive a salary: *"We simply do it in honour of our village, giving our services."* Villagers emphasise that literacy is important not only for their children, but also in their own lives as adults and when they hold positions in local organisations:

> **Patricia**: Has what you studied been useful for the positions you have held?
> **Mr. Pablo**: Yes, very. ... For example ... any document ... Yes, everything we are taught at school, in primary school, to prepare requests, receipts ... In some ways, at least, it is useful to me, isn't it? To serve the village.

Being illiterate, meanwhile, is seen as a restriction on participation in local organisations, because a great deal of reading and writing is involved:

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[53] All the quotations in this thesis are taken from tape-recorded interviews. Occasional quotations from field notes are indicated as such. In all cases, personal names have been changed.

[54] Current lieutenant governor, who has held other representative offices in the past (municipal agent, first policeman, president of the secondary school APAFA)

> "It would be difficult (for an illiterate person to hold a position) if, for example, (the person) doesn't know how to write, it is difficult (to hold) a position" (Mr. Brando)

Literacy, therefore, is seen as a tool for both personal participation in local organisations and for serving the village and sharing one's knowledge.

> **Patricia**: Have your studies (at school) been useful for these positions?
> **Mr. Luis**: Yes, very. From what I have learned, I share my knowledge, in any position I hold, from the little I have learned.[55]

Literacy, therefore, is seen not only as an individual tool, but also a collective one, as it is shared with the community. This collective dimension can be appreciated especially in the case of Mrs. Rose, a non-literate woman who is president of a women's organisation:

> **Mrs. Rose**: In the Glass of Milk Committee, we have a board, president, vice president, secretary, treasurer. They help me. When there are documents, if we have to ask something, I go to the office and they explain it to me. I am very honest, because I think it is better. I don't lie. I tell the person in the office, "I want you to help me understand. Read it to me a couple of times so I can understand it and remember it." "Why, ma'am?" "I don't know to read," I tell them. "But why do you hold this position?" Because people think a non-literate person cannot hold such a position. So I say, "Because the women trust me. I have been in this position 10 years. The village elected me. It was the village's decision. They say that if I don't know how to read and write, the secretary is there to help." Then I come back with the document. I remember it and explain it at the meeting. I say we have to do this, we have to keep new records, we have to follow these examples, and then the secretary does it.
> **Patricia**: So you support each other?
> **Mrs. Rose**: Yes, everybody helps. Ideas come from different heads, don't they? The secretary writes the official letters and requests, and then I go to sign. If I have to get copies I do that, I go to the photocopy shop. I go (to the office) and turn in the papers, they check them and everything goes fine. I only sign, on the papers they give me to sign, because I know how to sign my name.

Mrs. Rose's account challenges a notion that is common (even in the village): that illiterates cannot act as local representatives. On the contrary, she underscores the fact that other abilities (such as trust and networking) could be equally or more important. When she must cope with written documents, she seeks help from literate women or relatives, using her networks and the

[55] Vice president of the community board and the pre-school APAFA, treasurer of the primary school APAFA, president of one village sports club and the agrarian committee.

organisation itself to deal with the literacy requirements of her position. This kind of arrangement had been seen in other situations, where non-literate people get help from literate ones in the village, who act as scribes (Lund, 1997; Street and Street, 1991), or from schoolchildren (Zavala, 2001; Hartley, 1994). Barton (1994) and Street and Street (1991) emphasise that literacy can be considered a service or good that circulates within a community, like other services, and therefore there is no need for every individual to acquire it.

Although this is not the case in San Antonio, where the acquisition of literacy is seen as a need for every individual, the case of this woman shows an alternative strategy for coping with a lack of literacy. In this strategy, people can use mediators to fulfil literacy requirements. This might be a remnant of a past situation, when fewer people in San Antonio had access to literacy and schooling. Or it could be a current situation in other villages in which there are more non-literate people, as studies in Andean villages suggest (Zavala, 2001; Lund, 1997; De la Piedra, 2003). In any case, this situation and the quotations above show the collective dimension of literacy, which is considered a tool to be shared with others, along with its individual use and need.

Notions related to literacy as a tool for participation in social and public life confirm its importance in public spheres, as well as the collective meanings that literacy as a resource holds for villagers. We must pay closer attention, however, to who in the village is involved in this use of literacy and what this entails.

3.2.4. Literacy, local participation and gender

If we consider that representatives of local organisations tend to be the ones who must deal more frequently with writing and reading, it is interesting to note that representatives and local authorities tend to be men, except in the case of women's organisations.[56] In San Antonio, men hold most of these positions (see Table 4.4), although women participate actively in all local

[56] These organisations could be considered an extension of women's housework, since their main aim in both cases (Mother's Club and "Glass of Milk" Committee) is to obtain food supplies from state and municipal agencies to feed the family.

organisations, attending assemblies and expressing their opinions. In interviews with adult villagers, both men and women said that women are busier with household and domestic duties and therefore cannot participate as representatives or authorities, which are time-consuming positions.

Table 4.4. Gender distribution in local organisations and positions of local authority

Representatives	Male	Female
Community board	6	0
Pre-school APAFA	1	5
Primary school APAFA	3	3
Secondary school APAFA	6	0
SA sports club	5	1
JEM sports club	7	0
Mothers' Club	0	6
Glass of Milk Committee	0	6
Lieutenant Governor	1	0
Municipal agent	1	0
Total	**30**	**21**
Total in mixed organisations[57]	**30**	**9**

Being a community representative involves status and power, even at a local, but significant level, and it seems that men are more likely to gain access to such power and status. Interviews contribute to this hypothesis. As we have noted, parents consider literacy to be important for children, because it will allow them to become village authorities when they become adults. When referring specifically to girls, however, they don't mention this, but instead emphasise that the girls will be better mothers and will be able to help their own children with homework and schooling. Indeed, as next chapter will show, women are in charge of helping children with homework and literacy learning.

This evidence indicates a gender-related pattern in the use of literacy, in which men are seen as more able to cope with public uses of literacy than women. Literacy is also desirable for women, but mainly to improve their role in the domestic sphere. Different ways of using literacy, therefore, are associated with gender. Barton and Padmore (1991) suggest that differentiation of literacy practices according to gender appears to be related

[57] Excluding women's associations.

to broader gender roles in personal relationships and power at home. A particular kind of literacy connected with positions of status and power and relationships with the outside world are mainly reserved to men.

Harvey (1989), in her study about female participation in local politics in an Andean town, points out that a common explanation for women's lower level of participation in politics and public life has been their lack of schooling. She notes, however, that this view mistakes the effect for the cause. The question is why women have less access to education than men and whether the increase of schooling over the past generation will radically change the position of women in society or even in local politics. The case of San Antonio shows that schooling could be important in fostering women's participation, but does not necessarily entail a change in their status. Indeed, new generations of women in San Antonio have acquired more years of schooling, but this does not seem to have led to an increase in their participation in local positions of authority.

In this village, it is impossible to think that women lack the literacy skills and/or years of schooling necessary for coping with public duties and the production of documents. Although years of schooling is an indirect and imperfect way to approach literacy skills, it is nevertheless the best indicator available. Information provided above (see Table 4.2) shows that average years of study for men and women differ by only half a year, and that both averages are around 7 years, more than a complete primary education (six years). Of course there are women with little or no schooling, but there are others who have completed their secondary education, especially among younger generations of parents. The fact that women manage the literacy requirements of their own organisations (Mothers Club, Glass of Milk Committee) also shows that they do not lack the skills.

Although in general women are slightly behind men in their rates of schooling (following a national tendency), this does not seem to explain their absence from local positions, since even the most educated women in the village do not hold such posts. The women with more schooling also support the

argument that these positions are more likely to be held by men, as part of their role, than by women, whose domestic duties preclude their participation.

> **Patricia:** ...Positions are mainly held by men, aren't they? Why?
> **Mrs. Luisa:** Because sometimes a woman is busy at home, isn't she? But men, as people say, they should hold the positions because they are men.[58]

The contrasting case of the only woman in a position of power does not invalidate the argument. Until mid-2001, the lieutenant governor was a woman, who was also head teacher at the secondary school. As a professional woman, who was from the coast and the city (associated with higher status), she had a special status, which helped her attain this position. As Harvey (1989) notes in the case of the rural Andean region, women with higher status are generally treated like men.[59]

Gender roles and issues of power and status related to gender, therefore, would be at the basis of this exclusion of women from authority positions. This might also lead to a gender-related pattern in the use of literacy, in which men dominate its public and institutional uses. It could also reveal hierarchies among different uses of literacy, in which those with greater status are associated with public and male spheres.

3.3. Consumers, producers, citizens

Beyond local organisations, villagers also use literacy in establishing a more individual relationship with public institutions, either those in the village, such as the school and the health centre, or those in the nearby city. This section shows how access to health and education services, production permits and identity papers involves the use of the written word.

From a community perspective, the school involves villagers in different literacy events: registering children at school, helping children with homework, reading invitations to parents' meetings, signing permission slips for school

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[58] Luisa has a complete secondary education (11 years), has been secretary of the Glass of Milk Committee, and has been a promoter for a basic health programme. Given this background, it is even more striking that she considers it "natural" for men to hold virtually all positions in local organisations

[59] Including, for example, greater respect in rituals or the place where they sit at the table.

field trips, and reading the leaflet of grades and brief notes about the children's progress. Special celebrations (e.g., Mother's Day) involves the production of cards that the children take home. Children's Rights Week was celebrated in 2001 with a parade through the village (see next page). The children carried handmade posters (made by parents in many cases) on which children's rights were written. The parents' association at the school also involves several literacy events similar to those described for local organisations.

Despite the role of school in producing literacy events in the village, it does not promote the same intensive use of literacy that local organisations do. Indeed, the school's efforts to promote the use of literacy in the community are scarce and mainly non-deliberate. Rather, the school seems to consider its role as a literacy agent to be mainly related to direct instruction of students in the classroom or in school-related activities. For example, both the primary and secondary schools have school libraries with a combined collection of more than 500 books. Neither, however, encourages villagers to read and borrow books. The books in the school libraries are only for students and for school purposes, even though they remain unused. This indicates the school's rather restricted view of its role in literacy learning.

The basic health centre also helps produce literacy events in villagers' daily lives. Its building is full of charts, posters, signs, printed leaflets, records, etc. Leaflets containing recommendations for basic health care are delivered to villagers from time to time, pregnant women use a monitoring card to follow their pregnancy, and there are charts to track growth, nutrition and vaccinations for children under age 2. All children enrolled in public schools must also have an ID card to receive free medical attention.

Some villagers are health promoters and must work with some of these documents, such as the height and weight charts. For the promoters, training in basic health care involves reading and writing about health and nutrition, documenting the patient's case and presenting written reports about their work.

School parade during Children' Rights week

"No to violence". "I have the right to education and friendship"

Various posters about children rights. San Antonio Main Street.

For both patients and promoters, therefore, health services involve several literacy events in which they are exposed to different uses of the written word.

In the area of production, fishermen must obtain an ID card and written permission from Ministry of Fishery in the nearby city. The ministry uses written documents to inform community board of the times and dates when the ID cards must be renewed, closed seasons for certain species, and other regulations. Villagers must also negotiate with the Ministry of Agriculture for permission to cultivate rice in certain areas — mudflats known as *barrizales* — that change from year to year. All of these processes require villagers to use written documents, fill out forms and provide identity papers to support their claims.

Commercial activities involve also the use of literacy and calculation. Sometimes a receipt is needed to pick up a product after purchase, and the sale and purchase of products for fishing and agriculture involve calculation, although these operations are seldom put in writing. Cash loans are also frequent and often imply a written record of the transaction.

Villagers also need to acquire the identity papers required for all Peruvian citizens, a process involving management of different written documents. Identity papers are vital for Peruvian citizens, required in almost every sphere of life: to prove one's identity, hold a job, own property, do bank transactions, gain access to services, etc. The process of documenting one's identity begins at birth, with the birth certificate, which is required for enrolling children in school. Throughout life, events such as marriage and death must be recorded at the Civil Registry. At age 16, every Peruvian must go to a military office to obtain a military booklet, which is required in order to obtain a National Identity Document at age 18. The National Identity Document, in turn, is required for all legal and civil procedures.

Offices where identity papers are acquired are located in the nearby city. The processes for documenting identity were not part of the ethnographic work in the village. An ethnography of this process carried out by Lund (2001) in Southern Andes, however, shows that the ability to read and write, as well as familiarity with documents, their internal organisation and logical connections

are important advantages in the various stages and phases of documenting one's identity. Villagers in San Antonio are well aware of the importance of identity documents and keep them in protected and almost hidden places in their homes. Parents talk with their teenagers about the time, place and procedures for acquiring identity papers, stressing the importance of doing so to ensure that they have legal status.

Through the events summarised so far, we see that the villagers of San Antonio use literacy in a variety of ways in the village and beyond: as parents of schoolchildren, as consumers or providers (i.e. health promoters) of health services, as producers in fishing or agriculture, and as Peruvian citizens when acquiring identity papers. The use of literacy in daily life once again appears to be strongly related to public institutions and the market. This shows another dimension of the strong paper-mediated relationship that Peruvian State establishes with its citizens. Although these literacy events certainly can be considered as literacy imposed by bureaucratic administration, it is nonetheless true that literacy is indeed present in the daily life of the community.

3.4. Literacy and religion: the Catholic Church in San Antonio

Literacy is also present in religious life of San Antonio's villagers, who are mostly Catholic.[60] The villagers have a long tradition of Catholicism, since one of the first institutions to become active in the village was the Catholic Church (see section 2.3). A missionary priest visits San Antonio and several other villages in the area on an itinerant basis.

Some identifiable literacy events take place during religious services. Although most of the villagers are Catholic, not all attend Mass. The number of participants at regular Masses is usually between 30 to 40, including adults and children.[61] Both adults and children attending Masses take hymnals to read and sing the songs. There are usually more children and young people

[60] There is only one Protestant family in the village.
[61] The number of participants increases for special events, such as the Mass for the village's anniversary, when nearly the entire community was present.

than adults at Masses. Although singing is an enjoyable activity for all, for children especially it seems to be a motivation for attending services.

During the Mass, there is also a Scripture reading by a villager or by the priest. The priest then reflects on the reading, usually relating it to the villagers' daily life. People do not take Bibles to church, although many families own them. In fact, besides school texts, the Bible is the one book repeatedly reported as being present in most family homes. Bible reading at home is analysed in the next chapter, because it is more an individual activity than a collective practice at the chapel.[62]

The priest appears to be a resource person for some villagers' school needs. Villagers occasionally ask the priest if they can borrow a book to help their children with their homework. Teachers also seek the priest's assistance for religion classes, asking him to provide materials or teach a class. There is a small library at the priest's house, left behind by nuns who lived there until the mid-1980s, but except for school needs, people never ask to borrow books.

The church also produces official documents, such as baptismal and marriage certificates. Although the baptisms and marriages take place in the village, the documents are issued by the central church office in Pucallpa, and documents are centralised in the city. There are no archives at the chapel.

This brief account shows that literacy is also present in the villagers' religious life, especially through the reading of the Bible and hymnals. It is worth noting that both adults and children participate in religious services, in contrast with other community meetings (such as the community assembly), where only adults attend and are involved in literacy events.

Throughout this section, we have examined the presence of literacy in villagers' daily lives and the ways in which they use the written word. From the written landscape to local organisations and public participation, from accessing to social services and relating to public institutions to religious life,

[62] The study by Zavala (2001) in an evangelical Andean community shows how reading and memorising Bible verses is a central feature of religious practice and literacy events in the religious domain. In San Antonio, however, although there is a Bible reading at Mass, the process of reflection and interpretation of what has been read is more central to the religious act. Memorising is not part of the villagers' religious practice.

ethnographic data shows clearly that villagers interact with literacy in many ways. They do not live in a world without letters. On the contrary they engage in various literacy events to manage and organise their life in the community. Not only do villagers use literacy, it also conveys particular meanings and values for them. The next section explores such meanings in relation to broader perceptions about their importance in life.

4. Literacy, identity and status: the importance of being literate

Having seen the multiple uses of literacy in villagers' lives, it is not surprising that literacy is of great importance to them. I first noted the importance that villagers attach to literacy for participating in local organisations and public life in the village. Further evidence showed that literacy is used not only in collective relationships, but also in individual relationships with public institutions. Therefore literacy is present when villagers use health and educational services, in their productive and commercial activities, and when they acquire identity papers. All of these activities can be seen in the village. But literacy has meanings beyond village life. This section analyses how the importance of literacy is conceptualised much more broadly than the community uses we have examined so far. It also relates the villagers' conceptions with broader issues, such as the historical meanings of literacy presented in section 1 and the diverse social context of the region presented in section 2. The overall aim, therefore, is to show how literacy is linked to broader social issues and cultural meanings.

San Antonio's villagers consider literacy important not only in community life, but also beyond it. To become literate is important if one is *"to be something," "to improve oneself," "to defend oneself."* In the villagers' view, to lack literacy is to be unable to defend oneself from abuse and deception, to remain subordinate and in poverty, to be nothing. Literacy, therefore, is central to gaining a certain status, to being "someone" or "something" in life. The material referents of these rather general statements are associated with the possibility of pursuing higher levels of education, becoming a professional, holding a better-paid job, engaging in commercial transactions without the fear of being defeated, and in general the possibility of upward mobility.

These notions are similar to the meanings of literacy for other groups in Peruvian society, such as those presented in section 1. Literacy is seen as a tool for personal and material progress in a society marked by structural inequalities. Social and political processes that first restricted and later opened up access to literacy for the majority of the population seem to have had an enduring influence on the meanings of literacy for rural villagers.

What most of the studies presented in section 1 fail to emphasise, however, is that while literacy was related to a desire for democratisation and equality, it became (or remained) an element of hierarchical differentiation. In the case of San Antonio, it is possible to identify how literacy operates to place the individual in a better position in his or her relationships with other individuals or groups. In doing so, literacy becomes a tool not only for becoming more "equal," but also for differentiating oneself, for putting oneself in a better social position than someone else.

To understand literacy's role in such a process, it is necessary to examine social differentiation in the region and how villagers establish their own positions in social organisation. The work of Gow (1991) provides a rich characterisation of the social system in the region of Alto Ucayali/Bajo Urubamba, which is similar in many ways to the system in the area of San Antonio. In particular, Gow shows that different "kinds of people" are identified through the symbolism of space and civilisation, through ethnic categories and through their material situations.

Gow (1991) shows that people trace differences between different types of settlements along a continuum that passes through two extreme poles, the forest (*monte*) and the city. The forest is seen as hostile to the human, while the city is seen as the place of greatest human interference. Other types of settlements are ranked in terms of their proximity to one pole or the other. People are classified based on the place where they live, as well as the kind of contact they maintain with the outside world and "civilisation". Hence, people "living in the forest" have little contact with civilisation, in contrast with "civilised" people, who have more intense contact with national society and consume commodities not produced in the forest. Within this classification,

there are also ethnic differences that range from native (indigenous) people to white people. Once again, these are only two poles of a large continuum of kinds of people, which are closely related to the spatial continuum extending from the centre of the forest to the outside. As Gow stresses, there are no fixed positions or identities, because these are relational, and people position others and themselves as they interact in particular situations. These differences are also undergirded by material situations, such as poverty and wealth, in which rich people are situated closest to the pole of being civilised because of their knowledge and their ability to acquire commodities produced outside the forest, and the fact that they do not need to work for food. In contrast, poor people must tend gardens to feed themselves and have limited access to money for acquiring external commodities.

These multiple ways of establishing differences between people shows the multiple hierarchies in the region and how they are established mainly in relational terms. Thus, *mestizo* villagers in San Antonio, who live closer to the city and along the riverbank and have mixed ethnic origins, find themselves much closer to "civilised" life than their neighbours in villages farther from the river.[63] A woman explaining to me why she dislikes a young man who is interested in her daughter used these very categories. She argued that he lives far from the river, that she had not raise her daughter to live "in the middle of the forest" and that she was concerned about the kind of life he could offer the girl. She also stressed that the young man has a *paisano* (indigenous) surname and is therefore of indigenous origin. She said she could not introduce him with such a surname to her husband's family. As the man insisted, he was confronted and told these very things, not only by the woman and her husband, but also by the woman's brother-in-law.

But while the villagers of San Antonio can see themselves as being in a better social position than others, others may view them as "living in the forest" and assign them a lower social status:

[63] The importance of the symbolism of settlement and space also explains the insistence of San Antonio villagers to tell about the bigger proportions of the village before the last move, as showing its closeness to the urban and civilised pole of the continuum.

> "(in the health training courses in Pucallpa) sometimes I was embarrassed; I felt like I was less than they because they were from the city. They said we were "from the *chacra*' (garden). They felt they were above us and made us listen to them, as if they knew everything. They said, 'This is easy. This is the way to do it. I can do this.' Because I was from the *chacra*, I just looked at them and laughed. When it was my turn, sometimes I started to feel embarrassed, but I said I am also a human being. I should do it; I shouldn't be left out. I am neither better nor worse than they are. I am equal to them. It's just because they're from the city that they want to put me down" (Mrs. Luisa)

In the complex process of stating one's position in the region's internal social hierarchies, literacy appears to play a role. In facing the feeling she describes, for example, Mrs. Luisa tried to address them by participating fully and doing things well:

> "When they asked if I had practised the hymns I sang, I knew I had sung well. I did well in measuring size and weight. Because of that, when there was checking of documents I was the first to be called. (...) We had to do a lot of documents, and I did them. They sent me women to teach, and I had to teach."

In the interview, Luisa showed that her schooling and literacy skills have given her more confidence and helped her overcome feelings of embarrassment. Indeed, several studies have shown that the importance of literacy acquisition for many women, more than radically changing their position and social status in a society, helps them build a more positive image of themselves and take decisions to improve their lives (Tovar, 1996; Robinson-Pant, 2000).

The same process is observable among other subordinate groups in the region, as in the relationship between indigenous people and *mestizo* villagers such as those in San Antonio. Some indigenous people (Shipibo) living in the neighbouring villages attend the secondary school and health centre in San Antonio and therefore interact to a certain extent with the villagers. The *mestizo* villagers in San Antonio make a continuous effort to differentiate themselves from indigenous people, who have a lower social status as described above. Villagers in San Antonio do not consider indigenous people to be "people like us." They are a "different kind of people," and no one wants to identify with them because they are considered to hold a lower social

position.[64] Literacy and schooling are seen as tools for reinforcing such differentiation. Shipibo people from villages near San Antonio are aware of this, and when they pursue education and literacy, they do it in order *"not to feel less,"* in the words of Milder (a Shipibo student at the San Antonio high school); not to feel that they are less than urban people, less than *mestizos*, less than others who can claim a higher social status.

These two examples show how literacy becomes a tool for positioning oneself in relation to other individuals and groups. In the case of Mrs. Luisa, she relies on her literacy skills to perform well in the training course and thus establish a position on more equal terms with individuals or groups considered above her. In the case of the relationship between the *mestizo* villagers and indigenous people, literacy can be used to differentiate oneself from individuals or groups considered below one's position, therefore maintaining a hierarchical differentiation, as Milder perceives.

The association between literacy and power that we discussed earlier seems to play a role in the dynamics of social relationships between individuals and groups in the region. Because one's position is established in relation to another's position, literacy becomes a tool in the process of negotiating one's own position. Literacy can be used not only to reach a better social position, but also to maintain differentiation from those in lower social positions. Literacy, then, appears to be strongly related to power structures in the region and to social differentiation in a diverse social context conformed by groups of different origins and status that constantly negotiate their own positions, rather than remaining in clearly separated ones.

Moreover, on the continuum of "being civilised," literacy is certainly associated with outside knowledge and civilisation, the most prestigious end of the continuum. This is seen in the association between possessing literacy and "being something in life." Certainly, the rhetoric of "civilisation" that underpinned the access and spread of literacy and schooling (see section 1) seems to have had an enduring influence, as it has been integrated into

[64] The same happens with "*serranos,*" people from the Andes, who migrate to the region as colonists (*colonos*).

particular social relationships and power dynamics in the region.

Literacy is also a tool for relating with a broader national context. Indeed, literacy appears central to maintaining a relationship with public institutions and the Peruvian State. In section 3, I showed the intense use of literacy in villagers' individual and collective relations with public institutions. From managing the documentation needed to access services to acquiring legitimate status as a citizen through identity papers, literacy is a central requirement of the State bureaucracy. As such, literacy appears to be an external imposition. Nevertheless, literacy is also appropriated by villagers, who reproduce but also recreate the use of the written word for their own purposes (i.e. a local festivity, organising a community labour force) through a continual engagement with it.

Literacy therefore constitutes a tool for gaining status and defining an identity that allow a relationship with the State (to manage documentation needed to access services, to defend rights, to document one's identity), with the market (to get a job, to engage in commercial activities) and with other social groups at the regional and national levels.

One can see through the uses and meanings of literacy in the community that its importance is closely related to adult spheres of life, both personal and public. Public spheres of life appears to be the ones in which literacy becomes more important for rural villagers, precisely because it is in these spaces that the requirements for literacy are stronger. Literacy, therefore, appears to be related with adult life, power structures, official duties and negotiation with State agencies, either to access services or goods or to access citizenship through appropriate documents. Nevertheless, literacy is also related with the internal and local organisation of public life and with family and personal needs. To analyse this second dimension in greater depth, the next chapter will examine the home and the literacy events and practices carried out there.

5. Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, I have analysed the various ways in which literacy is present in the community of San Antonio. We have seen how villagers are engaged in different kinds of literacy events in the organisation and management of their lives. Looking at the written landscape, local organisations, religious events, access to and participation in health and education services and relationships with public institutions in general has shown a wide range of activities involving literacy. The overall picture that emerges of this rural community certainly cannot lead one to consider it an illiterate village, as rural settlements are usually viewed. Nevertheless, the case of San Antonio shows that there are many local uses of literacy that go unrecognised as such by others. For this reason, all of these literacy activities are not taken into consideration in the representation of rural communities.

Literacy practices identified in the community domain throughout this chapter show several identifiable characteristics. First, literacy is strongly linked with the relationship that villagers maintain with external and public institutions. This is expressed not only at collective level, through local organisations, but also when villagers approach public institutions individually. Second, written documents used in this relationship follow specific formats (official letters, health cards and charts, minutes books, identity paper applications, etc., all have pre-designed formats) usually imposed by external institutions. Third, although external institutions impose a great part of this literacy, villagers appropriate it and use literacy for internal purposes, such as village organisation and accounting related to the communal labour force. Fourth, in this domain literacy is mainly used by adults (except in religious uses), particularly male adults at the collective level. Finally, literacy is considered a central tool for maintaining and improving one's status in relation not only to the State, its institutions and the market, but also with other social groups in the region, and in general to attain a position in the stratified social structure that characterises Peruvian society.

CHAPTER 5:

LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE HOME

Introduction

Among the contexts in which children experience literacy, the home is one of the most important for the development of literacy. As Solsken (1993) points out, several studies identify the home as the primary site of social construction of literacy for children. Therefore the home context and literacy practices in it have been the focus of a number of studies, usually in relation with children's schooling (Taylor, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Solsken, 1993; Street and Street, 1991; Miller, Nemoianu, Dejong, 1986). Other studies have addressed the home context as encapsulated in community literacies (Heath, 1983; Moll, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Hartley, 1994; Gregory and Williams, 2000). In general, research shows that home literacy practices differ widely among and within social groups (Gunn, Simmons, Kameenui, 2001).

Because the values, beliefs and events surrounding literacy in the home constitute the primary experience in children's relationship with the written word, before and during their formal learning of literacy in school, this chapter focuses on children's homes and how literacy is present in their families' daily lives.

Although all homes (50) were visited, the chapter draws mainly on close observation of and interviews in nine households (see Appendix 2, Table 2.5). In selecting homes, different characteristics were considered[65] in order to approach different family situations found in the village. Special care was also taken to include at least one child from each grade of primary school, to ensure overall a similar number of girls and boys,[66] and to include children with different levels of school performance.

[65] See Appendix 2, Table 2.4 for details.

[66] I first selected the homes of five girls and five boys, but the number of siblings attending primary school, who were also considered in the study, slightly increased the number of boys (9) in relation to girls (6).

The chapter first explores how the written word is present at home from its visual traces to a range of literacy events conducted as part of daily life. Because parents consider the process of learning literacy in the home to be a formal one, it appears differentiated from other literacy events in the home and is analysed in the second section. Parents' values and self-perception of their role and teachers' demands regarding homework are also discussed in this section.

The third section addresses oral communication, which also plays an important role in the home, to show how children use their oral language experiences when approaching literacy activities. The fourth section analyses how children engage with the written word, relating their experiences at home and in the community. The fifth section addresses general ways of learning at home related to the domestic and economic activities in which children participate. One feature of children's experiences and learning at home, the presence of mixed age groups, becomes particularly important for this study and is also considered in this section. The final section discusses how learning and literacy are experienced at home to show the particularities of this specific domain.

1. Literacy in the home

This section focuses on literacy's presence and role in family life. Like the previous chapter, it begins with an examination of the written environment in the home as a first insight into the presence of literacy. Literacy is then examined as a tool for domestic organisation and personal communication. Reading and writing at home is also related to personal uses, such as entertainment, getting information and expressing affection. One of the more frequent uses of literacy, as it is used to help with school homework, is analysed separately, as it provides a first insight into school-home relationships.

1.1. The written environment at home

What are the traces of the written word in the children's home environment? Do they provide insight into family literacy? Do they show children's first involvement with the written word? These are the questions addressed in this section, before exploring literacy events observed among families and literacy practices that emerge from them.

In most of the houses, the walls of the living room (the household's public face) are decorated with printed material: a calendar, a school diploma and pictures from newspapers and magazines, which depict football teams, advertisements of food products, the virgin Mary, music groups or women in swimsuits. It is also common to put on the walls children's school works, such as cards. Certificates of studies (e.g. sewing, typing, basic health) are exhibited along with school diplomas, whenever they exist, in a prominent position in the living room. In a few houses, there are inscriptions in the wall, such as the name of a family or individual. In houses where something is sold, there is a handmade sign on the outside wall, and several product advertisements in the shop inside the house.

Books are usually stored in bedrooms, on a shelf set into the wall for this purpose, put in a pile, sometimes with children's notebooks. A census of printed material in every home revealed that almost all families (45 of 50) own some books. Only 33 families could indicate the approximate number of books in the home, but it was difficult to determine if these figures were accurate. Nevertheless, it can be said that there are few books per household, as no one except a high school teacher reported more than 15 books and half of the households reported between one and seven books.[67]

Although there were different kind of books in the village (see Table 5.1), most of those owned by San Antonio households were either school texts or religious books. An overwhelming majority of homes (82%) had only one or both of these kind of books. School and religious books also appear in

[67] The total number of books reported was 223. Considering that 17 families did not report how many books they had and the low numbers of books per family, the total hardly could surpass 300 books, meaning less than one book per person in the village.

combination with some other books, showing the dominant presence of both type of books over others.

Table 5.1. Types of books reported by households

Type of books	Description	Number of households[68]
School books	Math and language workbooks provided by the school	42
Religious books	Bible, hymnals, religion workbook	37
Technical	Health, nursing, sewing, cooking, agriculture, writing	7
Fiction	Stories and esoteric	2

Books are present in most households, therefore, but in small numbers and usually related with specific functions: school books for schoolwork and religious books for Mass and religious learning. Fiction (2) and technical (8) books are seldom present and usually belong to adults.

Another kind of printed material was reported in 36 households. It is conformed by newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters and personal documents (national ID card, birth certificate, health cards, etc.). In addition, containers of food products, buckets and even clothes provide some traces of printing at home (see also Chapter 4). For writing, almost all families have notebooks, pens and pencils. These are school supplies but are also used by other members of the family.

Traces of the written word in the households show the presence of a range of printed materials at home, from decorative devices to books, newspapers and labels of commercial products. The home environment therefore, like the community, is not free of written signs. The presence and type of books at home first suggest that they are mainly related with two institutions, school and church. Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine the events in which these printed materials are used inside the home, which are addressed below.

[68] Usually there is more than one type of book in each household, so the total in this table exceeds the number of households.

1.2. Domestic and personal uses of literacy

Direct observation of literacy events in homes was one of the most difficult tasks of the study. Repeated home visits were undertaken, but sometimes the very presence of the researcher prevented families from conducting such activities because they were "attending" the visitor. Through interviews, it was also evident that some literacy activities are carried out when there is free time for them. This is an uncommon situation, as parents themselves reported, because they are busy in domestic and productive activities. When they have free time, they engage in other recreational activities on a regular basis, such as playing sports and watching TV. Therefore free time for literacy activities is even more reduced. Nevertheless, through a prolonged stay in the village and repeated home visits, along with what was reported in the interviews, different kinds of literacy events became visible, revealing that families use the written word for a variety of purposes.

1.2.1. Communication and organisation of the household

One extended use of writing is related to short messages, letters and shopping lists. Villagers make shopping lists for a relative going to the city or for the pilot of the public boat, so he or she will purchase things for the family. Families that run small shops also use shopping lists intensively to manage their stock.

> **Mrs. Mara**: I have to put (write down) there, "a bunch of bananas" or whatever. I have to write a short note so (the person) who buys doesn't forget.

Villagers also use short written messages to establish communication between people in the village and relatives in the nearby city (Pucallpa). The pilot of the public boat usually acts as a messenger, delivering these messages personally to the addressee, who waits at the port in the city or the village. This form of communication requires that the person be in the port to receive messages, which must be arranged beforehand. At other times, therefore, a messenger's intermediation is a must.

> **Mrs. Mara**: When I want to send something to my sons here (Pucallpa), I have to send it with a known person who knows their

> house, because if I send by the collective boat, it doesn't arrive at their house, because they don't know (the house).

Villagers also sometimes write letters to communicate with relatives in distant places. Indeed, all the families in the village have at least one relative living outside it. In 29 of the 50 households, there is at least one son or daughter living outside the village, either in another village (29%), in Pucallpa (57%) or in other (more distant) cities (14%).[69] Because there is no postal service in the village and a messenger is needed, villagers report that they do not write letters very often anymore; rather, they prefer to use the telephone. There is no telephone at the village, but they travel to Pucallpa to call their relatives.[70] Sometimes they also use a combination of letters and phone calls:

> **Mrs. Mara**: I make up the parcel for my daughter, then I attach my letter to it and call her by phone to tell her I am sending something. (...) That way she knows and can go to the agency to pick up the parcel.

Several uses of literacy were reported in the chapter about community literacy events, including the writing of minutes, formal letters, financial reports for the assembly, etc. I will not describe them again, but I would like to emphasise that although these written documents belong to the community and public domain, the writing and reading that they imply are also carried out in the home context. Although this activity is usually a male responsibility (see Chapter 4), the mother sometimes becomes involved:

> **Mrs. Luisa**: (I write) when I help my daughters. Sometimes I help him (my husband) write some documents, an official letter, a summons. I help him, but I don't write very much for myself. I don't have anything anymore (referring to positions she held in the past as secretary of the Glass of Milk Committee and health promoter).[71]

People who prepare reports for the health centre, such as health promoters, also conduct their writing and reading in the context of home.

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[69] Source: Census of San Antonio.

[70] The use of mail entails some problems for villagers. First, there is no distribution of mail to or from rural villages. Second, relatives in urban areas do not have a proper mail address, because most live in shantytowns.

[71] Mrs. Luisa's experience as secretary and health promoter, as well as her complete secondary education, influence her involvement in helping her husband with documents. This seems less likely in homes in which the mother has less schooling.

1.2.2. Reading: information and recreation

> **Patricia**: Do you read any newspaper or magazine when you go to the city?
> **Mr. Pablo**: We read the newspaper, to at least know what is going on in the country (...) I mainly like sports. (I buy) El Bocon.

During boat trips, the reading of newspapers was observed several times. Villagers buy newspapers in the city and bring them back to the village, where some villagers report reading them in their spare time. Newspapers are mainly bought by men, but women also read them at home:

> **Mrs. Luisa**: I store newspapers when he (her husband) brings them. I keep them, and sometimes when I don't have anything to do, I pick them up, I read them. Sometimes I read things that one doesn't know, you know? You become informed.

Reading newspapers provides not only information, but also recreation:

> **Mr. Wally**: (I) also read the newspaper to distract myself, to relax myself, sometimes after hard work (...) for example about football, a bit of enjoyment for oneself, the newspaper. Sometimes educational reading, stories, fables (...) it's amusing to have posters, small magazines, a small library to distract yourself.

Reading for recreation involves not only newspapers, but also other printed materials, such as schoolbooks, with fables and stories for children, as Mr. Wally indicates. Mothers especially reported that they read school textbooks for the stories, to amuse themselves, but also to know the questions and content so they can help their children with their homework.

> **Mrs. Luisa**: I read their (school) books. When I read their books, I ask how to do (the work. I learn) how to solve the problems or sometimes the things that one didn't learn. There are some things there that you come to know when you read.

One mother reported reading stories to her 7-year-old daughter beyond school requirements:

> **Mrs. Di**: Lady likes for someone to read stories to her. (...) Since she does not read yet, she listens. She has a small book (of stories).

Many parents reported reading religious books, especially the Bible, but also the church hymnal and even school religious textbooks. The reading of the hymnal appears associated with recreation (singing), whilst reading the Bible

appears more associated with moral advice and personal formation and experiences.

> **Mr. Wilson**: Sometimes I have the opportunity to review a bit of the Bible, because I really like it. I used to belong to a youth group when I was young. In this village there use to be nuns ... and that brings back many memories. It was very helpful to be part of that group.

Mr. Wilson's words points out the impact of other experiences besides school in stimulating reading. In his case, having belonged to a youth group conducted by nuns more than 30 years ago is still a fresh memory and is related with his interest in reading the Bible. In the same sense, Mr. Wally remembered that he went to a library for the first time when he was doing his military service, and the wide range of books available impressed him.

1.2.3. Writing, affection and secrets

An almost hidden use of writing is love letters. Teenagers send short letters to each other to express their feelings of love hiding these letters from their parents, who may become angry. Letters express feelings of affection very overtly:

> *(From a teenage boy to a teenage girl in the secondary school)*
>
> PO,
>
> You are the woman of my life. I am deeply in love with you. JK

Lovers also write to one another to agree on a time and place to meet. These usually are extramarital relationships, so the letters were hidden and not reported in interviews, but the information was provided in more personal, intimate conversations. The extent of this use of literacy is therefore difficult to estimate, because it is a hidden practice related with personal relationships and sexuality.

The written record of feelings was also observed in a teenage boy's personal journal[72]:

> JL
>
> I will always think that falling in love with you was the best that has happened to me in my life and I will be always proud of the great love you have for me. I love you very much.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> AP

Although the hidden use of love letters and personal writings about feelings made difficult to collect a corpus of these documents beyond the few examples provided, their very existence shows a further use of literacy to express personal feelings. Children also showed awareness of this use of literacy; from the beginning of my relationship with them, they would write short, affectionate messages in my fieldwork notebooks:

> I love you miss Pati. Joshua (6)
>
> Miss Pati, we all love you. Tori, Edu, Saul, Joshua, Gary
>
> Miss Pati I want to tell you that December 5 is my birthday. Love I love you very much Miss Pati. Edu

Besnier (1993) has noted that little research has been carried out about writing and emotions. He points out that previous studies had tended to consider orality to be more affective than literacy. Further research, however, showed that some types of writing are more emotion-laden than some types of speaking. This erroneous assumption about differences between orality and literacy is based on an excessive focus on a particular kind of literacy, academic literacy. In his studies (1988, 1993), he concludes that expression of affection in spoken or written records is a function of the communicative norms at play in the society and not an inherent consequence of orality or literacy.

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[72] Personal journals were not observed among other teenagers or adults. The only example of this genre observed and reported here was a small notebook in which a variety of personal matters were written. This journal appears to be a self-generated genre of literacy, created by the young man to which it belongs, more than a extended use among youths. Nevertheless, it shows the writing of feelings as it is used by other villagers, such as in love letters.

Thus, studying letters in the community of Nukulalae, Besnier (1993) shows that there seems to be a license to display affection in letters that is not found in face-to-face interactions in the group he studied. In the case of San Antonio, this hypothesis is helpful indeed. San Antonio's villagers are in general very affectionate. They express affection to their children, especially babies. Children and teenagers are also very affectionate with their same-gender friends. Nevertheless, affectionate displays between couples, even married ones, have not been observed in public interactions. Teenagers seem to enjoy a more flexible situation, and some young couples can be seen walking hand in hand, but this is unusual. Moreover, they can do so only when they engage in a relationship with their parents' approval. In the process of falling in love however, overt expressions of affection appear to be less appropriate, and here love letters seem to have an important function. In the case of lovers who have a secret relationship, letters become important channels for expressing affect.

Children, however, enjoy freedom to express their affection for each other and for adults through physical demonstrations (hugs, kisses). At the same time, children seem to identify that writing can serve to express personal feelings that they might be too shy to express in speech. In doing this, children obviously draw on the experience they get at home, since writing about feelings is not part of school literacy events (see next chapter).

The literacy events presented in this section have shown a variety of uses and purposes of the written word as part of daily activities in the home. They are related to such domestic and commercial issues as shopping lists, communicating with people outside the village using short messages and letters, getting information and entertainment through reading newspapers and books, and such personal matters as affection and love letters. Although extended — i.e. present in almost all families (see Table 5.2) — the use of literacy does not appear to be intensive (i.e. carried out frequently or for many hours per day), as reported at the beginning. Villagers engage in literacy activities occasionally, when leisure time is available or when there is a practical need in which literacy is involved. Children do not appear directly involved in most of these literacy events. Nevertheless, from their indirect

participation (observing, listening, carrying messages to and from the port) they seem to extract the many purposes and uses that the written word has in their homes.

Table 5.2. Uses of literacy reported/observed in children's homes

Child	Shopping lists	Letters and short messages	Reading newspapers, Bible, books	Affection and secrets	Homework
Paula	X		X		X
Joshua	X	X	X	X	X
Mary	X	X	X		X
Beth	X	X	X	X	X
Tori	X	X	X	X	X
Luz	X		X		
Mickey	X		X		X
Saul	X	X	X	X	X
Edu	X			X	X

Children do interact with other members of the family, however, and are involved directly in one particular literacy event that was reported and observed on a more regular basis: doing homework. The particular characteristics of this event, which shows a first relationship between home and school, deserves special consideration and is examined in the next section.

2. Doing homework: the schooling of literacy?

In contrast with other literacy events that occur as part of family life, helping with homework appears to be more formal and structured and reveals a dynamic shaped by school procedures. Doing homework is an activity unto itself, in which a mother and child or children sit down together to review and do the day's homework. The mother reads the instructions and guides children in the task, usually providing answers or examples required for the exercise. One day, for example, Mrs. Luisa was helping her daughter, Mary, in an exercise that involved listing 20 common and 20 proper nouns. Luisa's help was to provide Mary with examples. The younger daughter, Pady (5) was also there doing a copying exercise, but she participated in the dialogue and understood the logic of the exercise:

Mrs. Luisa: Here it says you must write 20 common nouns. ... Let's see, write "ball" (she spells the word)
Mary writes
Mrs. Luisa: The bucket
Mary: The bucket... (She repeats and writes)
Mrs. Luisa: (reading a sentence in the notebook) The hen lays a chicken?
Pady: The hen lays an egg
Patricia: The egg! That's another (noun) — the egg
Mrs. Luisa: Banana
Pady: Banana, yummi
Mrs. Luisa: Pencil, with "c" (she corrects the spelling of the word Mary is writing)
Pady: Cat... suitcase... spoon
Mrs. Luisa: Erase ball, notebook is already written ... we need three more...
Pady: Spoon
Mrs. Luisa: Oh! This Pady!... Number nineteen, the pencil
Paddy: The pencil... earring, necklace, shorts
Mrs. Luisa: Blouse. ... Now, you have to do the proper nouns. ... There's no more space here, Mary. ... Let's continue. ... Chile

In this excerpt, it can be noticed that the mother doesn't try to encourage the child to produce the answer on her own. Although the objective of the exercise is that the child learns to differentiate between common and proper nouns by making lists of them, the mother does not encourage this recognition. Instead, she does some dictation in order to make the child copy and fulfil the formal homework requirement. The younger sister, who is in pre-school, follows the examples that the mother offers and provides further examples that are all correct, showing she came to an understanding of the kinds of words required in the exercise. Mary is so busy copying words that she can hardly produce examples, as her younger sister does.

In mathematics exercises, it was also observed that the mother indicated the operation that should be done, without waiting for the child to recognise the need for a suitable procedure on his or her own. This was observable when I became involved helping a child with homework, trying to guide her step by step so she could determine the suitable operation. The girl was interrupted by her grandmother, who gave the indications in advance instead of waiting for child's response:

Patricia: What should you do here?
Mrs. Mara: You should add (without waiting for the child's response) Sheila went on adding.
Patricia: Sheila, can you read the question?
Mrs. Mara: Get the double of these numbers...
Patricia: Let's make Sheila to read this question, so she can practice (the next one)
Sheila: Go...ge...get... th... the...tri...trip..triple...of...
Mrs. Mara: You don't know how to read well! You are forgetting it... (to me) She used to know how to read well before!

In the events observed, the mother tries to act as a (traditional) teacher, indicating what to do, correcting errors in writing or reading, and pointing out the child's mistakes rather than giving positive feedback when he or she does the work. When the mother corrects errors in the child's writing, the emphasis is on spelling and the formal conventions of written language:

Mrs. Luisa: Yesterday, for example I was teaching her sentences, with what letter to start, at the beginning of sentences it is with capital letter, at the end you put the full stop. You have to check the full stop and comma, accents, the words.

When correcting errors in reading, the emphasis is similar, asking children to read with pauses, to pronounce question marks or exclamation signs, to improve the volume or the speed:

Mrs. Mara: Saul is lazy, I don't know what to do, I force him to read. My husband asks him to read. He says, "All right Saul, you read that reading. "... Saul appears angry, grumbling, maybe he is spelling, I don't know. (My husband) says, "At what time will you read?" and he laughs. (My husband) says you must stop at the full stops, you must stop at the commas, you must read, but you read directly. You have to stop at those commas, at those full stops; for example here is something, then you shut up for a while, then you start again. It's the same with questions, with exclamation marks. You must exclaim. ... That's the way to read, son. (...) I also read to him. (I tell him) you must breathe at each comma. He laughs. I say you can't read without breathing; you must breathe as a rest at each comma, at each full stop. That's how you read; doesn't the teacher teach you?"

The way mothers help with homework is undoubtedly shaped by their own educational experiences as pupils and also by their perceptions of what schoolwork is and how it works.

Mrs. Luisa: (During holidays) I give them dictation, exercises ... to practice, so they don't forget. I also tell her she must learn to read,

> otherwise she forgets. (...) I teach her, for example, exercises that come in the books. I teach them to her, I make her work out the questions so next year the study won't be difficult for her.

Mothers appear guided by traditional conceptions of schoolwork (dictation, drill, reading aloud), which is still the predominant strategy found at the school (see Chapter 6). The mother's own beliefs about good reading and writing are also involved, with the stress on formal conventions and correctness. Traditional instructional strategies, such as dictation, are used also by older siblings when helping with homework or playing school.

> Some words are written with chalk in the wall of the living room in Mrs. Di's home.
> **Patricia:** Have you been doing some dictation with your girls (pointed at the wall)?
> **Mrs. Di**: Oh, no, that's Lady. Paula was giving Lady some dictation.

The constant requirement by teachers and the school that parents help children with homework as a way to improve their literacy learning seems to reinforce the use of direct teaching and traditional strategies:

> **Teacher Penny**: (last year) there was a girl in third grade. I put her in the second grade group because she didn't know dictation. (...) I didn't let her pass, and her mother asked me why.... I had told her, **you teach her dictation, you dictate words to her at home, you teach her the (multiplication) tables, at least teach her addition.** I said to her, your girl only plays here all day, she has to practice. ... She doesn't mind then. What can I do? I made her repeat the grade.

The examples provided show that literacy and calculation are central in homework activities. Indeed, literacy and calculation are seen by all parents as the central outcome of schooling. When doing homework, the centrality of literacy can be observed in the tendency to stress helping younger children in early years of schooling, when they are beginning their literacy learning, whilst less stress is put upon older children:

> **Mrs. Di**: Paula does her homework alone. Sometimes when she doesn't know, she asks to the teacher. ... I almost never look at her homework. She's already in sixth grade; it's time that she does it alone. I concentrate more on Lady's homework (grade 1).

It is not a coincidence that examples provided in this section show mothers in charge of helping with homework, since they usually perform this task. Fathers sometimes participate, especially when a more difficult issue is

involved (in general males in each couple have more years of schooling). Fathers are busy in the afternoons with fishing, however, and this limits their involvement. Involvement with homework is seen as part of the mother's duties. A gender-based pattern regarding literacy therefore emerges in this situation. Barton and Padmore stress that the person in charge of some literacy activities seems to depend "on whether they are regarded as a crucial part of negotiating with the outside world or whether they are seen as being part of the housework" (1991:67). In this sense, children's homework in San Antonio falls within the domestic sphere of life. By contrast, uses of literacy in local organisations (see Chapter 4), which involve a relationship with the outside world, appear to be undertaken mainly by males. Nevertheless, men are conscious of the importance of literacy in relating with the outside world, and this in turn may influence their involvement with homework.

This is more clearly observable in Andean indigenous rural villages, where males usually have more schooling and are bilingual, in contrast with little or no schooling for their female partners, who remain monolingual. Here, fathers consider literacy an important tool for negotiating with the outside world and have more linguistic and educational resources than mothers. Thus, fathers appear more involved in doing homework and supporting children's schooling (see Uccelli, 1999). In San Antonio, the increasing educational level of mothers reinforces a process that makes doing homework part of housework, and thus women's responsibility.

Throughout this section I have shown how mothers respond to school demands trying to reproduce school procedures. They seem to consider this activity clearly separated from daily uses of literacy at home, in which children are not expected to participate so directly. This perception appears influenced by school discourse, because teachers strongly recommend helping children with homework and teaching them directly as a way of improving school achievement, particularly literacy learning. The importance that parents place on literacy acquisition (see Chapter 4) may also influence the formality with which they carry out this activity. Not all parents respond with the same intensity to such demands, however, and differences can be found among homes, as I discuss below.

2.1. Values, roles and resources: parents doing homework

In doing homework, the relationship between school and home appears stronger than in other home literacy events. It is not possible to avoid the teachers' demands on and expectations of the children's homes and the complex ways in which they are met (or not) in the home.

Teachers in San Antonio, as in many other rural villages (see Uccelli, 1999; Ames, 1999), usually complain about what they interpret as rural parents' "lack of interest" in their children's education when they do not give their children enough help with their homework. Teachers emphasise this lack of interest and believe that rural parents are not educated or do not have time to help children (see also Chapter 6). Although teachers generalise these statements to all rural parents, the previous section showed that some mothers do invest a clearly separated time to help children with homework and try to comply with teachers' requests. Nevertheless, a closer view of the children's homes reveals differences in the type and degree of parental support. These differences, however, do not seem to be associated with parents' values and interests regarding education, as teachers tend to believe. On the contrary, they are related to the parents' view of their own educational role and the resources they have for fulfilling this role.

2.1.1. Values

Indeed, despite the teachers' claims, all parents interviewed express a strong commitment to their children's education, which has a high value for them. Parents see education as *"something to leave for our children,"* something enduring that will be useful in their children's future. It is common to hear parents say they want their children to be *"better than I am."* Children cannot *"be like us, who stay behind (with less education)."* In general, all parents are conscious of the restrictions of their own poverty, and they associate it with their (lack of) education. All express a desire to be more educated than they actually are, but many reasons prevented them from studying longer: their parents' poverty, the need to work, family duties, starting a family early. They want their children to achieve these aspirations and go further than their parents.

> **Mrs. Luisa**: education is important for my children, because someday, when they are grown up, they'll know things. I don't want them to be like me. (...) It's important for them to be something, to be something in life, not to remain uneducated, so that someday they'll have a job and help others, their own children, with all they've learned. ... I tell them, "You must study, girls, I say, so you don't remain like me, without an education, like little donkeys, so you can teach your own children one day."

Mrs. Luisa's words are representative of the ideas among San Antonio's parents. One must study in order to be "something in life," to be a better parent and help one's own children, to get a job (see also Chapter 4). Children cannot be like their parents, in a situation painted as backward. Even though Mrs. Luisa has a complete secondary education, she draws a picture of herself as a person who didn't study enough, and who therefore remains in poverty. Children must progress and be better than their parents. Literacy and schooling are seen as central tools for achieving this, and parents are committed to supporting their children in acquiring these tools.

Not only are these values held by parents, they are also transmitted to children from a very early age. As Mrs. Luisa points out when repeating the words of her 8-year-old daughter, children see clearly what is expected from them:

> **Mrs. Luisa:** (Mary said to me) "When I become a professional, I will never see you without teeth." She told me, "Nor my father. Nobody. I'll work to earn money and with that I'll serve[73] you," she told me. ... I hope so!

Despite the high value placed in schooling, parents are aware that the quality of the education the children receive at the school in San Antonio is far from the ideal they envisage. Some consider migrating to the nearby city to provide their children with a better education.

2.1.2. Roles

Parents might have a different view than teachers of what it means to support children in school. Parents perceive their role primarily as providing the material support their children need in order to study: food, clothing and

[73] To serve = to give money

educational materials. Besides this (important) material support, in all homes except one, parents also considered helping with homework to be important and part of their role in helping children succeed at school:

> **Mr. Brando:** Joshua gets homework everyday, and one has to be there keeping an eye on him.
> **Mss. Brali:** Yes, because if one does not support one's children, they do not make progress. They can't do it alone. Sometimes there are topics they don't understand. We have to give them a bit of guidance in that topic, so they can answer the questions.

Only in one family is helping with homework not considered part of the parents' role. Mr. Roberto, father of Luz and Joseph, criticises teachers for blaming parents for lack of support:

> **Mr. Roberto:** Teachers come and do not teach well, they don't teach the way they should, and then they say, "The parents have to support the children." OK, one can support with the children's notebooks, clothes, shoes, backpack, whatever ... But instruction is their (teachers) responsibility; that's why they're paid to do it.

Mr. Roberto has a different view of his role as father. He puts a high value on education, supports his children's schooling by providing them with material supplies and participates in the parents' association. However he seems to delimit clearly the role of teachers and parents, establishing a marked separation between home and school. Mr. Roberto points out an important issue: teachers cannot excuse themselves by blaming parents if children do not learn, but must recognise their own responsibility for children's literacy learning. Also, they cannot equate helping with homework with the parents' commitment to education. Although Mr. Roberto disagrees with the role of parents as instructors, he is committed to providing all his children with an education. In explaining his attitude toward helping with homework, therefore, Mr. Roberto's view of his role as parent is more important than his more general values regarding education. His view of his role, however, is also influenced by other factors.

2.1.3. Resources: economics, education and personal plans for the future

> **Mr. Roberto:** I remember that in my case, my parents were non-literate. They didn't know how to read or write. They used to tell me, "Son, you have to take an interest, it's for your own good. We couldn't study because our parents, in the old times, didn't want to send us to

> school, but now we're in another world, we have to improve ourselves. So I send you to school; you have to learn. Let's see what you've done." I showed them my notebook ."That's nice," they said, but they didn't know what I had written there. (...) They were happy with what I told them it said, and they said, "Aha, correct."

Mr. Roberto's words raise the importance of generational differences, experiences and resources among parents that shape their own role in their children's schooling. Mr. Roberto draws his criticism of the teachers' discourse from his own experience of having non-literate parents (who were unable to help him with his homework) but successfully completing his primary schooling. His words emphasise that despite their illiteracy, his parents were keen to motivate him to study, holding a strongly positive value of education and sharing it with him. The image of Mr. Roberto's parents looking at his notebook, unable to read it but showing interest in their child's education, shows the many ways in which parents, even non-literate ones, see their role of supporting their children's schooling.

This case also shows that parents may have different resources for fulfilling the role expected by the school. Mr. Roberto is 54 years old, his parents were non-literate and he finished his schooling in 1960, when only primary education was available. His situation and attitude contrasts with that of Mr. Brando and Mrs. Brali, who emphasise the importance of helping with homework.

Mr. Brando (33) and Mrs. Brali (32) are younger than Mr. Roberto. Mr. Brando had some secondary education and was supported by his literate parents.[74] Other young parents of the same generation, such as Paula's and Mary's parents, have also had more years of schooling or have completed their secondary education. Parents in this younger group were already literate, having had between one and five years of primary education.

These younger parents emphasize the importance of helping with homework. In addition to having more years of schooling, parents in this group share other characteristics. All their households are small nuclear families with only

[74] Mrs. Brali regrets that because of her family's poverty, she had only five years of primary education.

two or three children. For these couples, family size was a choice directly related to their desire to provide better living conditions and education for their children.[75]

Having fewer children, mothers have more time to attend and help them. Their educational qualifications also help them provide such support with more confidence. These three younger and more educated couples also have more ambitious plans for their children (i.e. higher education). They plan to move to the city in the future to achieve this goal. These plans also act as a framework within which they view their role in their children's education as more active and demanding.

Multiple factors, therefore, can contribute to parents' attitudes towards doing homework and supporting schooling: having more schooling themselves, their own experience as students, having literate parents, future plans, how they see their role as parents and the teachers' discourse about this role.

It is not possible to generalise parental attitudes solely on the basis of age or generation, however, as their personal experiences seem to play an important role. Parents in other families, although they are Mr. Roberto's age or older, do report helping with homework and trying to provide various types and degrees of support, as will be shown below. Tori's parents, for example, although older (37 and 44 years old) and with less schooling (both have five years of primary school) than the younger group, also stress the importance of doing homework as part of their role and provide such help to their children. In this home, the mother is of urban origin and both parents run a small shop, which requires regular visits to the city and frequent use of literacy for commercial purposes. Their urban and commercial experience, therefore, may influence their attitudes and behaviour regarding homework.

[75] Through the public health centre, modern family planning methods have been more available to this younger generation than they were to earlier generations. Both younger and older women, however, know different herbal medicines for contraception and abortion. The decision to have a small number of children therefore may be less related to the availability of contraceptive methods. Changes in personal and family plans for the future appears more influential: big families are useful for agriculture and fishing, but when education, professional skills and urban migration are the goals, a small family allows for a better distribution of scarce resources to achieve higher levels of education.

2.1.4. Alternative strategies

Mrs. Rose (49), a non-literate mother, also considers helping with homework as part of her role and seeks for alternative strategies for doing it:

> **Mrs. Rose:** Vivian does her homework, and when she doesn't know she asks her brothers. (...) I cannot read and write. That's why I cannot help my children with homework; I don't know those things. The easier things, to be there to support them, to review how it is, if it is well written or bad, I can help them that. Their brothers help them in secondary school subjects.

Mrs. Rose has no schooling and acknowledges she cannot help her children as much as she would like. However she is there to provide support and ensure that the children do their homework and get help from older siblings. Despite her illiteracy (or because of it), Mrs. Rose has managed to provide an education for her nine children and her adopted grandson.

The parents of Beth, Saul, Mickey and Vivian (and Edu) also belong to the older age groups (from 37 to 66). All live in extended families, and three are raising a school-age grandchild (Saul, Mickey, Edu). The families of Beth, Vivian-Edu, Mickey and Luz are large (with 12, 11, 10 and 12 members respectively), and their parents are busier, with less time to spend with their young children and with limited economic resources for a higher education for all their children.

Nevertheless, parents take advantage of the large family size by delegating to older children the task of helping younger children with their homework:

> **Mrs. Lessy:** (The children's) sisters also help them. They teach each other. The ones who are in secondary school teach those who are in primary. (...) I am with them (the children) most of the time, and their sisters always help them with their homework. (Mary's mother)

Support from siblings has been observed in other studies among minority communities in which parents do not have the educational and/or linguistic qualifications to feel confident in such task (Gregory, 1998; Uccelli, 1999). The educational level of this group of parents is lower than that of the younger group (see Appendix 2, Table 2.5). The parents of Mickey, Saul and Beth have incomplete primary education (three and five years in each couple). The

lack of schooling may be the source of the feeling that they are not well enough prepared to help their children with schoolwork.

Examining different degrees of parental involvement in helping with homework, it becomes apparent that there are other aspects besides values regarding literacy and schooling that explain differences among homes. All the parents place a high value on literacy and schooling, but not all share the same view of their role in their children's schooling. Most think they must provide support with homework as part of their role, but in at least one case, instruction is considered the teachers' responsibility.

More importantly, not all parents have the same resources for carrying out the role demanded by teachers. Some parents, particularly younger ones, have more years of schooling and are therefore more confident in helping their children. Others have less schooling or none at all, but find alternative strategies for fulfilling their perceived support role, supervising the children or ensuring that older siblings help. Younger parents also have fewer children than older ones, so their limited economic resources can be concentrated on their children's education. Large families, in contrast, have scarce economic resources that must be used to feed and educate more children. Although desirable, it is unrealistic for them to plan higher education for their children.

Finally, helping with homework is not the only indicator of parents' commitment to their children's education. Mr. Roberto's memories and Mrs. Rose's words suggest that even in the case of non-literate parents, care must be taken before they are labelled as disinterested in or unsupportive of their children's schooling and literacy learning.

Much attention had been devoted to the issue of homework, because of its importance for parents and teachers. The information presented so far, however, shows that homework is not the only way for children to engage in literacy learning. Indeed, the tendency to encourage parents to help with literacy learning at home through explicit instruction is common in many countries (Lareau, 1989; Gregory and Williams, 2000). Some studies, however, such as Taylor (1983), point out that there is little evidence to suggest that children who successfully learn to read and write are specially

taught by their parents. In the families participating in her study, literacy is deeply embedded in the social process of family life and is not some specific list of activities added to the family agenda to explicitly teach reading (Taylor, 1983: 92-93). Nevertheless, spontaneous literacy events at home seem not to be considered either by teachers or parents as ways to foster literacy learning among children. Even less attention is paid to other language experiences of children at home as part of their literacy learning process. The next section will briefly address oral communication at home and discuss how both oral and literate experiences in the home are actively used by children when approaching literacy.

3. Oral communication at home

As noted in the previous section, although there are many uses of literacy at home, children are not directly involved in all of them. Children receive help with homework, but other uses of literacy are mainly undertaken by adults or young people. Only one mother reported reading stories to her daughter as an event different from homework. Nevertheless, children learn many stories and tales through oral means, and they also constitute a repertoire for their literacy. This section will explore this relationship between orality and literacy, first presenting oral communication at home and then analysing how children can draw on these resources when approaching literacy.

Children in San Antonio are very talkative. From a very young age, they are encouraged to develop their oral language. When they are babies, their parents and siblings talk to them directly. When they start to produce sounds, parents and siblings enthusiastically decipher and give meaning to their sounds. Children caring for young siblings talk about the words the babies are learning and ask them to produce those words for other children or adults. Children also like to teach babies to say some words, putting less emphasis on correct pronunciation than on the general sound that makes the word intelligible. Progressively, casual corrections make children pronounce the word correctly. This process seems more natural and fluid than the directed teaching of writing and reading observed when doing homework.

The interest that parents and siblings show in babies' language development and their ability to communicate with others encourages them to develop language skills for communication. Babies and young children are therefore stimulated to produce oral language so that adults do not have to guess their needs. Children are not rushed to do this, however, and developing of oral language seems to be a smooth process in the daily relationship with family members.

Children talk about a wide range of daily affairs, such as visits to gardens (*chacras*), the fish catch, their activities and those of their parents and relatives, trips to the city, village events, local gossip, games, TV programmes and characters, the weather, the environment, etc. At home, children hear news about many issues and comment about them when they are with other children. Few issues appear to be kept from children, since almost all comments are made in their presence. This does not mean they can participate in all adult conversations. On the contrary, when adults talk children usually remain silent, but they listen. On other occasions, they are invited to participate in adult conversation and their sense of humour or ability to recount an event or story in an amusing way is celebrated by the adults listening to them.

The oral tradition characteristic of rural areas is also present among San Antonio's families, in which children learn tales, stories and accounts of events related to the magical and spiritual world. There is a wide set of traditional beliefs that includes supernatural beings, such as the mother or the father of the trees or animals, the spirit of the lake, the spirits of dead (*tunchi*), etc. These supernatural beings are connected and interact with human beings, sometimes menacing, sometimes helping. Stories about the supernatural world are mainly told and heard at home, but they are also shared in children's groups. The supernatural world is not the only subject of stories told at home. Everyday matters and community events are retold in and among homes. A robbery, damage to crops, a death, an accident, a pregnancy, disease — many topics are recounted and commented on more than once in the same day or for several days. Everyone adds details to an event and retells it with new information. Children therefore are well informed

about village life, and the concerns of their parents and neighbours as they listen to their conversations. Moreover, they retell what they have heard to their peers or to other adults.

Oral communication, therefore, is strongly developed in the home, not only for basic communication, but also to receive and transmit information, knowledge and moral values (e.g. through tales) and to fulfil recreational needs.

Both orality and literacy are present in family dynamics, and some functions are developed more through one means than through the other. Perhaps the fact that recreational needs, stories and tales, daily events and knowledge about the environment, fishery and agriculture are transmitted and developed through orality explains why these issues are almost absent among literacy events conducted with children. Nevertheless, when using literacy, children can draw positively on the rich oral tradition at home, as an exercise with them showed (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Writing stories: blending orality and literacy

At the very end of the fieldwork, I asked children from the homes I had observed to write some stories. Although the purpose was to test their literacy skills, the outcome of the activity was much richer and provided further insights into the children's engagement with literacy.

Children in first and second grades (Vivian, Wilson Jr., Jan, Joseph and Lady) didn't write stories. They said they didn't "know how to do it." Children in grades 3 to 6 first showed some insecurity in approaching the activity. They first tried to copy a story from a book,[76] but when I insisted, they produced original short stories. I read each story aloud, without marking any errors in spelling or punctuation, sharing them with other children with the consent of each author. The positive and encouraging feedback to each child produced an unexpected outcome. Without the fear of being judged or graded for their errors, and with the possibility of sharing a story with a real audience, three (Joshua, Edu and Mary) of the seven children started to write more stories and brought them to me during the following days. Two other children also asked to write stories, although they were not required to do so. In all, they produced 20 short stories.

The children's stories varied in length and structure, but shared some common features. Most of children (7) started the story with formulaic openings, such as "once upon a time," clearly drawn from stories they had read at school. Only three children wrote a title for their stories and three marked the end with a formulaic closure. All added a drawing. There was preference for using animals as main characters, especially animals of the region that were well known to the children. Human beings also appear in some of the stories, however. Even when animals were the main characters, the topics were generally related with daily life and language was clearly marked by oral speech.

In general, the structure of the stories is heavy influenced by oral speech. There are no internal punctuation marks that indicate the internal structure of the text (in oral speech, pauses and different intonation help structure the story). Some of the stories fail to establish the symbolic context within the text, demanding an additional (oral) explanation by the writer. Only the longest and most elaborate stories established a difference between direct and indirect discourse (Paula, grade 6 and Beth, grade 4). Both stories had a more elaborate argument and developed a funny situation, an appreciated characteristic of oral interactions, as explained above.

Despite errors in punctuation and grammar, the children did produce written stories and they did it with an enthusiasm not observed when doing writing exercises at school. In producing stories, the children drew upon topics, characters, conventions and words that are part of their daily life and oral communication. Children therefore used their language experience, both written and oral, to produce stories. In this way, they showed that they could use more resources to develop their literacy skills than those usually required by school, such as those needed for doing homework.

[76] At school, children are more accustomed to copying than to producing their own stories, as the next chapter will show.

4. Children and their curiosity about the written word

So far, the description of literacy in the home paints a complex picture of how the home context influences children's literacy learning. One may be tempted to take either a negative or positive view of such influence. On the negative side, the scarcity of books and other written materials, and the lack of children's direct involvement in most literacy events at home could lead one to consider the home context restricted in fostering literacy learning. This view is common among teachers (and sometimes educational researchers), who consider poverty, the parents' lack of education and the lack of books to be major explanations for children's failure in literacy learning at school. A positive view is also possible, however, because books and written materials are present and do play some role in the children's immediate environment. Before they start school, therefore, they are familiar to some degree with both the presence and variety of uses of the written word. To move beyond this dichotomy, it is necessary to focus on the children themselves and how they experience their first contacts with literacy.

Literature has shown that children's literacy learning begins long before they go to school (Czerniewska, 1996; Gunn, Simmons and Kameenui, 2001). As literacy is part of children's social world, they have an ongoing involvement with literacy and experience its form and functions before starting to learn it formally in school. It is in children's interaction with others and in an environment of printed language that they try to work out the many forms, functions and meanings of literacy. Studies of this process, mainly in urban families (Taylor, 1983; Heath, 1983), have shown how literacy is deeply embedded in the social process of family life.

These explanations have been developed in fully literate environments, leading one to ask whether such involvement also takes place in rural villages. I will argue that it does indeed. As the preceding chapter showed, the rural village is not a non-literate environment, as there are many uses of the written word in a rural community. In addition, notwithstanding the amount of written material available and the uses of literacy inside home, these

nevertheless exist and involve literacy practices that children try to sort out from a very early age.

Children are conscious that literacy plays and will play a role in their lives. They are told and taught by their parents about the importance of becoming literate. From the written landscape, it is evident that children find printing in their everyday life, both in home and in the community. Children react to this presence of literacy with a great deal of curiosity and efforts to determine how it works, developing their own interpretations and ways of gaining access to how literacy functions.

The exercise in which children mapped out written signs along the main street and defined the purposes of such signs (see Chapter 4) showed that they came to an interpretation of the functions of written signs based on their knowledge of the commercial uses they saw daily in community life and during their visits to the city. They emphasise commercial uses of such signs because these are the uses they know best and experience most frequently. This does not mean they cannot broaden their comprehension of the multiple uses of written signs, but it is interesting to note that they use what they already know about social life to answer questions about the uses of written posters. This indicates that they understand some **functions of print** based on what they see and experience in the community and at home.

Another example of ways that children involve themselves with literacy was also reported in Chapter 4. During their frequent visits to my home, children read labels on food products, first trying to guess the name of the product through visual clues such as pictures. They sometimes recognised signs they had seen on television and related to the product, identifying it though they could not read or had no direct knowledge of the product, as was the case with a pot of mayonnaise, a product none of the children had tried before, but which they had seen repeatedly advertised on TV. The same happened with the small logo on my hat, the face of Colonel Sanders, which the children quickly connected with a fried chicken store, although Kentucky Fried Chicken obviously does not exist in their town or in Pucallpa. Nevertheless, the children had seen TV advertisements and were able to relate a visual sign

with its meaning based on the (limited?) knowledge they put together. These examples show how children actively relate visual signs with meanings and information. They also show how children use all kinds of knowledge that they already have to build a way to decipher written signs, beyond the technical skill of decoding. These brief examples demonstrate that children show an understanding of how written words represent meanings and convey a message, that is, the **purpose of print**.

I did not have the opportunity to see children's written production at home beyond school homework. In their constant visits to my home, however, school-age children engaged in several situations of spontaneous writing and drawing. Their first writings were their complete names, one of the first things they are interested in learning and that is taught by parents or teachers. Their favourite activity, however, was drawing. They would then write some words naming things inside pictures. They also wrote brief, affectionate messages to me about our friendship and their feelings, as reported above. During one week in which I replaced an absent teacher, I took school books home, and children visited me and copied pictures and texts from the books.

Some weeks later, as a typewriter was stored in my house, children decided to explore it and produced texts, such as their names, affectionate messages and songs they knew from school or TV. Box 5.1. showed how children became enthusiastic with the production of written stories, and drawing upon their (oral and written) language experiences to produce them. They produced these stories at home in small notebooks or on pieces of paper I gave them, but without adult assistance, showing a personal engagement with the task.

These three brief examples of spontaneous writing by children again show them enthusiastically engaged with the development of their knowledge about the uses, purposes and functions of literacy. They generate self-directed activities with the written word when they approach it outside an institutional context, drawing on their experiences at school and home. They also go further, however, as these activities (especially typewriting songs and producing written stories) were not common in any of these domains. Moreover, these examples show that children can engage in literacy activities

as part of their play, although most of the time literacy is presented to them as work, both by home and school.

5. Learning at home

Children's learning experiences at home are not related only to literacy or school contents. They are also linked to the domestic and productive activities that San Antonio's children carry out. A look at these activities and the way they learn to do them indicates four central characteristics of learning at home: the development of a sense of autonomy and responsibility, the importance of observation, practice as a mean of developing skills, and the multi-age nature of the learning process. The first part of this section focuses on the first three elements and the fourth is explored in the second. This provides a broader picture of the home as a learning environment and will allow, later in the study, a comparison with ways of learning at school (see Chapter 8).

5.1. Children's roles and ways of learning in the home

Children in San Antonio perform various tasks in the home and community to support domestic and productive work. Their work is not only an aid to family survival, but also a way of mastering domestic, agricultural or fishing skills in preparation for becoming productive adults. In this sense, the life of San Antonio's children is similar to that of many other children in rural communities. Literature on children's socialisation in the Andes (Anderson, 1994; Ortiz y Yamamoto, 1996) has shown that children are part of productive units (households) and are involved in productive and domestic activities from a very early age.

What are the activities that children carry out? Girls and boys help almost equally in domestic duties, carrying water and firewood, caring for and feeding small animals (chickens, hens, pigs), washing dishes, doing light shopping, sweeping the house, carrying things to/from the port and taking care of younger siblings. They also help in agriculture (maintenance of gardens, harvesting, planting) and fishing (carrying fish, nets and tools; checking nets

and doing light fishing). After age 12, activities among girls and boys are clearly differentiated according to gender patterns of work among adults. Girls are busier with domestic duties, whilst boys spend more time in agriculture and fishing or making and repairing tools for productive activities. By age 12, a boy usually knows most fishing and agriculture techniques (although the practice of some of them will still wait until he becomes strong enough to carry them out). The same happens with girls, who are skilful in many domestic and productive tasks carried out by women.

Parents foster children's sense of responsibility about their tasks through verbal encouragement, but also they punish irresponsibility. Children realise from a very early age that each member of the family plays a role and try to satisfy their parents' expectations and family needs. But children are not always engaged in domestic or productive tasks. They have much free time to enjoy when they finish such tasks. Both during their free time and whilst doing tasks, children enjoy great freedom of movement inside the village. They also go outside town to farming areas when accompanying adults or older siblings.

These responsibilities and freedom of movement indicate a great deal of autonomy among children, since they are not always under their parents' supervision, but care for themselves and engage in their own activities, frequently outside the home.

Free or accompanied movement inside and outside the village is also important as a way of learning. It allows children to observe their environment and get to know it with great deal of accuracy. They learn from adults or other children not only the names, uses and characteristics of trees, plants and animals, but also the location of farming areas, to whom they belong, what has been cultivated last year and this year, and some notions of crop management. Each visit to farming areas implies that children will work helping their parents and learning from them how to do different tasks. Older boys sometimes accompany their fathers when they go fishing and learn various techniques from them. In their relationship with their environment and in helping their parents, children develop a very deep sense of observation. They are always commenting on whether the river level is up or down, if it will

rain, how big the crops have grown, etc. Environmental observation is fostered by adults who are always concerned with (and talking about) different environmental indicators relevant to their productive and daily activities.

Observation is also a direct way of learning when interacting with others and it is complemented with practice. For example, when children explain games to one another, more than explaining the steps verbally, one child shows each step to another, who tries to repeat it after observing it. Observation also appears to be a central learning strategy when parents teach children:

> A group of children is trying to help Oddy disentangle thread used to repair nets. Edu (9) does it best, and I ask him:
> **Patricia**: Who taught you?.
> **Edu**: "Nobody, (I learn) just by watching how my father does it."
> (Fieldwork notes, Mrs. Rose's home)

Observation, therefore, becomes an important way of learning. When I was an apprentice myself in several situations, adults and children taught me more with practical examples than with explicit explanation. The adult carries out the activity and the apprentice must observe and practice the steps demonstrated by the instructor. Adults and children can recount the steps for some specific procedures (e.g. preparing an herbal medicine, planting corn) when asked to do so. In the teaching process, however, there is more emphasis on practising the different steps, and specific verbal instructions are provided in relation with each step only when necessary (such as "do this" or "do it this way," followed by practical example) rather than as an explanation of the entire procedure. The instructor may correct the learner by showing the right way to do the task, but without sanctioning errors.

Children are expected to learn progressively, and they are given more difficult tasks as they master previous steps. This suggest a scaffolding strategy for fostering learning. Children feel proud when they become competent in the activities required of them and they build a strong sense of competence in these skills (a more elusive experience at school, see Chapter 6). This in turn fosters their sense of autonomy as learners.

The centrality of observation and practice for learning in rural communities, more than explicit verbal instruction, has also been pointed out by literature describing Andean rural communities (Anderson, 1994; Ortiz y Yamamoto, 1996). Learning through practice is also exemplified by the common use of making small tools for children, modelled on real work tools, with which they can play and work (Ortiz y Yamamoto, 1996). This strategy is also found among children in San Antonio. Small paddles are made for children, for example, so they can learn and practice paddling a canoe, a skill many children have acquired by age 6. Although there are no small *machetes*, a central tool for almost every activity, children as young as 6 can also handle these.

Ways of learning at home therefore appear guided by observation, practice and a sense of responsibility and autonomy in carrying out domestic and productive activities. These strategies contrast greatly with the explicit and formal instruction used in literacy learning at home and the ways of learning at school. Before discussing this difference, however, another characteristic is worth exploring, especially because of its potential benefits for multigrade classrooms.

5.2. Mixed-age children's groups: care, play and learning

An important characteristic of the home as a learning environment is its multi-age nature. This is observable not only inside homes, but also in the groups that children establish outside the home as part of their daily activities.

Indeed, children's home environments tend to be characterised by interaction with many persons, both adults and children. This is due to the size (74% of the families have between four and eight members) and type of families in San Antonio — predominantly nuclear families (26), but with a high number of extended families (24) as well. Family size has several implications for children's educational context. First, having a large family implies a intense interaction among various members of different ages. Second, large family size may imply less attention for children, since their parents must attend many children.

Three generations working together

A group of grandmother, daughter, daughter-in-law, adult grandchild and children from 3 to 14 years toasting, peeling and grounding cacao seeds from the grandfather' garden to make cacao bars.

In contrast, in small families parents have more time to attend children. Large families, however, imply the presence of older siblings who may be in charge of younger children, giving them attention and support. Interaction with members of different age groups is also stimulated by interrelated families living in the village (those of grandparents, uncles, aunts). Most of the time, therefore, children interact with relatives of different ages.

Children, however, do not spend all their time inside the home and in the company of adults. Much of their time is spent outside the home in the company of other children. Sibling and peer groups have been considered by other studies (Ortiz y Yamamoto, 1996; Anderson, 1994) as an important socialising agency in rural communities. Children in San Antonio share their time with siblings, but also with other children who are relatives and/or neighbours.

Children spent several hours per day in groups in which ages ranged from 3 to 12 years old, since older children are usually accompanied by their younger siblings. Mixed age groups, therefore, are part of the daily experience of children in San Antonio. The relationships among children of a wide age range are usually very good. Older children are very patient and affectionate with younger ones, although they are also authoritative voices. They can give orders and instructions to younger children, who tend to be obedient. The children play a variety of games together, from sports (volleyball, football) to local games (caps, jump with an elastic band, rhythmic palms, the thread), games that mimic life (the little store, the school) and self-invented ones. Children are very imaginative, always inventing new ways to play and using for play any found object (logs, bottles, canoes, mud, etc.).

Play is a common and frequent activity among children, who do it not only at particular times, but also in the middle of their tasks. When they go fishing or carry water, because they go with other children, they take advantage to play a bit or do the work as play. Adults are permissive with children's play and consider it as a natural activity for children.

Although important, play is not the only activity in which mixed age groups engage. Among siblings and relatives, caring for each other is a regular

activity (e.g. dressing a little girl, bathing a little boy, feeding a younger sibling). Through play and care, children also learn from each other. While bathing at the river, for example, a 6-year-old girl caring for her 4-year-old sister may teach her to swim, as Joshua's cousins did. A group of boys going fishing in the lake teach each other what they know about fishing as they do so. While helping her mother with the cooking, an older child may show a younger one how to do some tasks. Children also enjoy teaching babies new words and identifying progress in their oral language development. Older children sometimes play school with younger ones and teach them as teachers, as Paula does with her younger sisters. When doing homework, children are helped not only by their mothers, but also by older siblings, as mentioned above.

The children in San Antonio, then, have many experiences of playing, learning and working in multi-age groups. In relation either with adults or with other children, the multi-age nature of the interaction seems essential to the learning process. A kind of scaffolding strategy, in which the older person helps the child progressively master the activity, appears to be used not only by parents, but also by older children in multi-age groups. Children also learn how to interact with each other despite age differences and not only with children of the same age, a valuable experience when children attend a multigrade classroom.

6. Discussion and conclusion: Home, literacy and learning

In taking a closer look at the different ways in which children experience literacy beyond school, this chapter has addressed the home environment. The chapter has shown the presence and uses of literacy at home in a variety of activities and for different purposes. From the written environment and the printed material available at home to the diverse range of literacy events, literacy indeed plays a role in family life. Families use literacy in different ways within a particular range, from organising domestic and commercial needs to personal communication and affective relationships. Parents also use literacy for recreational and informative purposes. Nevertheless, oral communication also plays an important role for both purposes.

Despite the extended use of literacy at home, it appears to be mainly undertaken by adults and youth. The occasions on which adults and children become involved together in a relationship with the written word in the home are mainly related to doing homework. It therefore seems that parents consider the literacy learning process to be more formal, separated to certain extent from their daily uses of literacy. Moreover, doing homework seems to be shaped by school ways of organising instruction, since it follows a traditional teacher-pupil pattern of interaction and emphasises the correctness of reading and writing.

These moments are clearly divided from those of play and informal family interaction, showing a special place inside family routine. This special place is related to the parents' values regarding literacy learning and schooling. Parents take both processes seriously, considering them very important to their children's future. The formality and seriousness of helping with homework and direct literacy instruction at home could reveal a sense of "work" related with literacy, particularly its learning. Children should do their homework before they go to play. A sense of duty is related with school homework and literacy instruction.

This leads to another element that appears when analysing community literacy practices: literacy appears to be an activity linked with the adult world. From the parents' point of view, the importance of literacy acquisition for children lies mainly in the role it will play in their future, when they become part of the adult world. Because of the "importance for the future" that literacy and schooling has for parents, one cannot help noticing the lack of emphasis on its importance "for the present." Parents do not seem to consider it important for children to do some reading to learn things beyond their school work or to read and write for pleasure, entertainment, communication, information or any self purposes related to their present life. Nevertheless, parents do use literacy for these very purposes.

This perception of literacy as important for the children's future appears related to the ways in which parents experience literacy as part of their adult life. As analysed in Chapter 4, literacy is important for parents so they can participate in local organisation and public affairs, relate with external

institutions, the State and the market, and acquire full status as citizens. The requirements that parents face in using literacy in all these spheres make literacy especially important for their adult life. They make literacy a serious thing.

In relating community and home literacy practices, a clear division of labour regarding literacy is also observed: fathers tend to handle literacy activities related to social organisations and public participation (see Chapter 4), while mothers tend to cope with literacy instruction at home. This division mirrors sexual division of labour and gender roles that assign women responsibility for housework and child rearing. The traditional gender division in parenting roles is present across different social groups in western societies.[77] They might vary in other contexts, however, as is seen in Andean indigenous communities (Uccelli, 1999), depending on how literacy activities are considered. In San Antonio, the gender-related pattern of literacy use at home corresponds with that found in the community and reveals different gender positions of power and status in the home and community.[78]

Beyond this division, parents want both girls and boys to become literate, as both will face, as adults, the many demands of the outside world regarding literacy. In contrast with the social demands of adult life, however, literacy for children is seen as strictly related to school and formal literacy learning. Children must learn literacy, but they are not expected to participate in literacy events at home beyond the school's formal requirements. Parents do not seem to consider involving children in less structured literacy events as part of the children's literacy learning.

[77] See Laureau (1989) for a comparison between upper-middle and working-class parents' involvement in schooling. Although parents in these two groups varied in the degree, quality and quantity of their involvement in schooling, it is clear from this study that mothers in both social groups are still more involved than their male partners in children's schooling.

[78] These positions are also reinforced through parents' perceived economic roles: the father is considered the main economic provider because he earns money from fishing and/or agricultural activity. The mother's primary occupation is considered to be housework, which is not given the same economic value as male activities. The mother is also heavily involved in agricultural production and, to a lesser extent, in fishing, but her participation in both activities is underestimated.

Nevertheless, children appear actively engaged in building an understanding of the written word beyond formal instruction. They try to deal with literacy in a more unstructured way, following their own interests and curiosity. This becomes clear in their relationship with written signs, when they used knowledge from their daily experiences to understand the forms and functions of written language. The data analysed also reveal that children carefully observe and scrutinise the uses of literacy in the community and family life. When approaching the written work, they draw from all their experiences with it, even if these experiences involved them indirectly. In this way, both their formal learning and the informal ways in which they approach literacy become a resource upon which they build their literacy learning, as their written stories, affectionate messages and hand-made posters show.

That children are deep observers of their natural, social and written environment is also observable in their ways of learning at home. Children's involvement in domestic and productive activities at home leads them to progressively develop a range of skills for carrying out such activities and a sense of autonomy. Learning these skills, however, does not follow the formal, structured procedures observed for learning literacy, but a more participatory approach in which children learn through practice, observation and involvement in the activity itself.

Children sometimes approach their activities as work, but usually make them a mixture of work and play, as they carry them out in the company of siblings and other children with whom they also spend their free time. This presents a context in which mixed age groups are part of the children's daily experience, involving play, work and learning among the members of the group.

This feature is fundamental to the particular school context in which children are formally educated: the multigrade school. In the multigrade classroom, children of different ages and grades study together. Their previous experience in mixed age groups could be a resource for teachers and teaching strategies for these classrooms as well as for the literacy learning process. A closer look at children's schooling in San Antonio becomes necessary. The next chapter concentrates on literacy practices and learning in San Antonio's school.

Girls doing homework in the front door.

CHAPTER 6:

MULTIGRADE SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES

Introduction

The school is an institutionalised domain in which literacy practices are shaped not only by local features, but also by wider institutional procedures and practices. In this chapter, while I consider certain issues similar to those analysed in Chapters 4 and 5, several aspects characteristic of the school domain are emphasised. The uses of literacy in the school are analysed in relation to teaching and learning strategies. The multigrade classroom also deserves special attention as a particular form of instructional organisation. Finally, school practices are analysed within the current context of Peruvian school system and the introduction of the new pedagogical approach, NEP (see Chapter 3).

Like previous chapters, this one begins with an overview of the written landscape at school as an initial insight into the uses and meanings of literacy in this domain. The second section focuses on school literacy events, situating them within teaching and learning strategies and demonstrating the diversity of teaching and learning strategies among teachers, even though their practices show a similar approach to the written word. Teaching and learning strategies are shaped by and shape the management of multigrade classrooms. The second section also shows how different strategies for approaching the multigrade classroom are in play.

Teachers' backgrounds and conceptions about multigrade teaching, school knowledge, literacy learning and the children's context are strong forces that orient both the selection of teaching and learning strategies and multigrade classroom management. They are explored in the third section, showing how teachers' choices about how they teach are informed by such conceptions.

The fourth section looks at teachers' literacy practices beyond the classroom, showing similarities between their own uses of literacy and their teaching. The final section discusses the literacy practices in the school domain that emerge

from this analysis and the challenges they pose to current efforts to improve children's learning.

1. The written landscape at school

This section takes a first look at the meanings and uses of the written word in school by looking at the written environment. The kind and variety of written material help identify particular institutional contexts in which literacy is used and show how it is used.

The school is a profusely lettered environment. Although this environment varies from classroom to classroom or from year to year, a general picture emerges that is similar to that of many other Peruvian rural schools that share similar guidelines for organising classroom layout.

In each classroom, there are learning corners that correspond to curriculum areas.[79] There are also corners for the attendance list, turns for cleaning the classroom, school norms and organisation, and a hygiene corner. The chalkboard is usually covered with writing. In some classrooms, there are also decorative devices such as paper flowers and butterflies or chains of coloured paper.[80]

Street and Street (1991) note that the written environment in the classroom is part of a process that places the individual within a particular sign system. Indeed, the visual environment in these classrooms provides a first approach to the kind of knowledge that school offers and the type and uses of literacy (a sign system) related to such knowledge. School knowledge appears here as compartmentalised, detached from daily experience, decontextualised and related to the world outside the community. Corresponding with this type of knowledge, school literacy objectifies written language and presents it in a decontextualised way. All of these characteristics could be observed in analysing the written environment of the classrooms.

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[79] Such as: integral communication, logic-mathematics, science and the environment, personal and social, and religious formation.

[80] See Appendix 4 for a sketch of the layout of one classroom in 2000.

The presence of learning corners, a kind of introduction to school content, suggests that this knowledge is compartmentalised and associated with different subject areas. Prior to the current reform (see Chapter 3), learning corners corresponded to courses (language, math, natural science, social sciences, art and religion). The reform encouraged a shift from course-related corners to integrated ones. Also it encouraged the use of learning corners not simply as decorative spaces, but as places to be used in learning activities.

One extended example of this could be the "little shop." As it name implies, this corner is an imitation of a small shop, with labels of food products, plastic bags, cans and different containers, as well as some play money. This corner could have different learning purposes: to familiarise children with written words, such as those on labels; to encourage them to read these words, identify letters and sort out the meaning of such words; to do math operations, buying and selling items as they would in a shop; and to interact with each other in role playing and social interaction.

At this school, however, the learning corner has not been used in this way. Previous ways of thinking about learning corners overlap with new ones. Although the concept tries to move beyond the teaching of separate courses and looks for ways to integrate them, in many cases "area" merely becomes a new name for "course." The concept remains the same; only the subject matter changes.

The use of learning corners is still far from being integral to teaching and learning activities. Sometimes the teacher moves a chart or picture from its location to the front of the classroom to use it as part of the lesson. When asked about learning corners, students say their classrooms look nicer, but they recognise that they do not use these corners as part of their activities. Learning corners, then, become depositories for teaching aids or decorative devices, but are not actively used for learning activities.

The contents of the learning corners also provide insight into the kind of knowledge the school offers, further revealing characteristics of school knowledge. Most of those contents are related with the outside word, with little or no reference to the children's immediate context. In the fifth and sixth grade

classroom, for example, the science corner has pictures of animals foreign to the region, as well as landscapes and cities (pictures cut out of magazines) from other parts of the country or other countries. In the personal social corner, there are many photographs from magazines of women in swimsuits, white and blonde children, beauty queens, posters from the Health Centre, a football player, a couple of national heroes and electrical appliances. The communication corner displays similar photographs: a woman in a swimsuit, a blonde child, a television, the president at the time (Alberto Fujimori), cars, electrical appliances and a very old radio. Some were labelled with the name of the person or object pictured.

The selection of drawings and pictures for these corners clearly shows that school knowledge is mainly related to the outside world, with the contents (and values) that come from it. This suggests another characteristic of school knowledge: it is detached from the children's daily experiences and therefore decontextualised.

Finally, in contrast with the village's written, the school's written landscape looks like a collage. There are numbers, letters, photographs, figures, colours, messages and headings. Writings that provide coherent information are mainly related to regulations, the role of cleaning and slogans. In the learning corners, besides headings, there are only some words naming figures. Only in the communications corner (grades 1 and 2) are there texts to read, and they do not correspond to children's activities or interests. Instead, they are taken from a specialised (police) magazine, use difficult words and are directed mainly at an adult audience.

The school owns a collection of 317 books, including six sets for each grade's classroom library. These books, however, remain stored in the head teacher's office. Teachers have access to them to prepare their lessons, but children are not allowed to borrow them. One teacher used to bring some books to the classroom occasionally for reading. The practice of storing books in such a way that children do not have free access to them is also observable in other schools (Ames, 2001). This situation is related to the teacher's role as

mediator of school knowledge. He or she administers the type and frequency of children's access to such written material.

An analysis of the written landscape at school provides insight into central features of school knowledge and literacy. The written landscape of San Antonio's school is somewhat related to school contents (e.g. headings of each corner), school activities (e.g. turns for cleaning) and school procedures (e.g. regulations). It is school-oriented writing, therefore, that is not related to daily activities beyond school. Meaningful writing in the school environment is scarce, especially writing related to children's experiences, even as students. It contrasts greatly with written landscapes outside school, which at least have some identifiable social uses and purposes.

As Street and Street point out (1991:157) the organisation of the visual environment helps to construct and provide a model of the child's relationship to language and the written word. If written language is broken down into its component parts (letters, isolated words), it becomes clear that this will be the way in which it will be approached: through the learning of bits, parts and components, and as an objectified device that should be examined, mastered and removed from its context of use. This is certainly what happens at this school. To understand how this process takes place, however, it is necessary to look at teaching strategies and literacy events at the school.

2. School literacy events

Literacy instruction is one of the main concerns at this school. Indeed, teachers dedicated most of their lessons to literacy. This is evident when looking at their classrooms, their lesson plans and the children's notebooks. Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 clearly show that literacy is the subject receiving the greatest concentration.

Table 6.1: Number of sessions observed per subject

Teacher/ Subjects[81]	Literacy	Numeracy	Natural Science	Social Science	Religious Formation	Total sessions per teacher
Penny	6	2				8
Maria	4	1			1	6
Olga	11	8		1		20
Cesar	6	2	3	1		12
Mario	3	4		2		9
Total	**30(55%)**	**17 (31%)**	**3 (5%)**	**4 (7%)**	**1 (2%)**	**55 (100%)**

More than a half (55%) of sessions observed in all classrooms were dedicated to literacy learning. Except for mathematics, other subjects received scant attention. The overwhelming importance of literacy appears again in lesson plans. Most (43%) were dedicated to literacy. If we also consider numeracy (32%), three-quarters of lesson plans are dedicated to the two subjects.

Table 6.2. Number of lesson plans per area[82]

Teacher/ Subjects	Literacy	Numeracy	Natural Science	Social Science	Religious Formation	Total lesson plans per teacher
Penny	31	22	8	4	2	67
Maria	12	11	5	3	3	34
Olga	2	1	1			4
Total	**45(43%)**	**34 (32%)**	**14 (13)**	**7(7%)**	**5 (5%)**	**105(100%)**

The weight of literacy in everyday classroom practices is also reflected in the students' notebooks, where they write down all their lessons every day. Looking at the notebooks, we find again that more than half (57%) of the lessons are dedicated to literacy instruction, followed by mathematics. The emphasis is greater in the earlier grades, whilst in upper grades there are slightly more lessons on other subjects:

[81] Although the current National Curriculum refers to areas of personal development (see Chapter 3), I prefer to refer to subject contents that better reflect what teachers do in classrooms.

[82] Source: Classroom diary or pedagogical portfolio. Data from three teachers. The sample was taken at the end of the 2001 school year, before the final evaluations. Notice that teachers vary in the number of lesson plans they write down, and many lessons are conducted without such plans.

Table 6.3. Number of written lessons per subject in children's notebooks[83]

Grade level/ Subjects	Literacy	Numeracy	Natural Science	Social Science	Religious Formation	Total of lessons
Grade 1	25	12		1		38
Grade 2	13	5		1		19
Grade 3	5	6	2	1	1	15
Grade 4	5	4	1	1	2	13
Grade 5	6	5	4	1	1	17
Grade 6	14		1	2		17
Total	68 (57%)	32 (27%)	8 (7%)	7 (6%)	4 (3%)	119 (100%)

These data show that literacy is the main subject developed in the school curriculum at San Antonio. It is also used for various school subjects, however, making the use of the written word a constant in almost every school activity.

Nevertheless, only a limited number of types of literacy events are observed. The most frequently observed event among all teachers was copying. This represented 57% of the overall time dedicated to literacy events in the sessions observed.[84] The task of copying writing produced by others ranges from copying isolated signs, numbers, words, sentences and paragraphs to copying lesson contents and homework instructions. All teachers use copying as an important part of their classroom activities. Chalkboards and notebooks, therefore, are the most-used resources every day. Whether teachers explain a topic and write it down or design exercises, at some point the children copy everything written on the chalkboard into their notebooks, a task that usually takes a considerable time each day.

Dictation (8%) is used more with children in grades 2 to 6, as they are already able to identify signs corresponding to sounds. The dictation of words, sentences, stories or lesson contents was observed among all but one of the teachers. It is believed that children improve their writing skills by taking dictation and copying. The content of the dictation is sometimes not as important as the event itself and the mastery of coding and decoding skills.

[83] This sample is based in one child per grade, one notebook per child. Children use only one notebook for all the subjects, but use several notebooks during the year, starting a new one when the previous one is full. This sample consists of notebooks with lessons from October/November 2001.
[84] Including those not dedicated to literacy instruction.

Reading (12%) takes different forms depending on the teacher. Reading activities range from reading aloud (words, sentences, stories), in which the emphasis is more on correct pronunciation rather than on understanding what is being read, to reading short stories followed by reading comprehension questions.

Writing production (23%) is used in different ways ranging from self-production of written words or sentences (as part of exercises) to complete texts. Production of texts by children can follow two patterns. The first is the production of texts according to models provided by the teacher, in which children can hardly produce writing beyond the parameters provided. Sometimes this written production more closely resembles copying than effective self-written production. The second is the production of texts without models or parameters provided by the teacher. Neither the instructions for this type of writing nor the criteria for assessing it are clear. Teachers, therefore, vary greatly in the ways in which they use writing production.

The ways in which literacy is used at school and examples of them are analysed below. They must be understood as part of teaching and learning strategies and school procedures. Although all teachers use literacy as summarised above, there are various strategies for literacy events. I address this diversity by looking at each teacher's teaching and learning strategies below.

2.1. Teaching and learning strategies

The San Antonio school has three teachers. During fieldwork, however, two were reassigned and replaced. I have therefore had the opportunity to examine the strategies of five teachers at the same school, although at different times. Each teacher has a classroom of two grades, which correspond to one cycle. At times, however, a teacher might teach more than two grades at once. This section and the following ones are based on these five teacher case studies.[85]

[85] See Appendix 2, Table 2.6 for the number of sessions/hours observed per teacher.

I focus on literacy events at school with a particular emphasis on the teaching and learning strategies in which they take place. I examine the diversity of the teachers' strategies, analysing different types of literacy events, such as dictation, copying, reading and writing production through examples from each of the teachers observed, selecting the types of literacy events that are most distinctive in their classrooms. Despite differences in teaching and learning strategies, however, literacy events follow a common pattern dictated by school procedures and practices. What is common among all teachers is a particular approach to written language as an objectified device, a feature that is dictated by the national curriculum and that characterises school literacy (Street and Street, 1991). More importantly, literacy is presented as decontextualised from the children's experience and encapsulated in school activities (this time in contradiction with what national curriculum encourages — see Chapter 3). These features are exemplified below through discussion of the teachers' strategies.

2.1.1. Learning letters: Olga and the first grades

The way in which children first experience school literacy, its formal teaching and learning, provides a good starting point for analysing the relationship with written language that the school fosters and the conceptions about literacy that underlie it.

Grade 1 children began learning letters one by one, then syllables, then words and then phrases. Letters are learned by copying them. Teacher Olga gives an example at the top of a page in the notebook, then children write the same letter in the entire page. The same procedure is used with syllables, words, phrases and numbers. Sometimes children are asked to draw a picture or sing a song, but with no relation to their literacy learning process. Grade 1 children therefore spend most of their time on copying exercises. They are expected to learn to write through repeated copying of bits of written language. They also write numbers and later simple arithmetic operations to solve.

Grade 2 children do copying, dictation and calculation. Reading aloud (texts or words) was observed few times, but there were no reading comprehension

questions. The purpose of the activity seems to be simply to "practice reading."

Olga's strategies are mainly based on copying and dictation activities. An excerpt from her class clearly represents several features of her teaching and learning strategies:

Excerpt 6.1. Classroom observation. Grades 1, 2 and 3[86]

8:29 a.m.

Teacher Olga writes the date in the chalkboard and leaves the room. The children copy it and wait. After 10 minutes, the teacher comes back and announces dictation for grades 2 and 3.
T: "Number 1!, number 1! Are you ready?"
S: Yes!
T: "One. Elisa. Capital E. Is it a name of animal or a person?"
S: "Person"
T: "That' s why it's with capital letter."
T: "Elisa weight the dough" ... "Pepe drinks the soup ... Number 2: Pepe drinks the soup"
The teacher dictates the sentences from an adult literacy book. Some children (grade 1) approaches teacher's desk to ask for activities or to show their writing (grade 2). She says she will check it later.
T: "Number 3: Camila drinks milk"
S: Camila?... Drinks?...
The teacher checks a grade 1 notebook and says:
T: "Whose notebook is this? Why is it a mess?"
She does not wait for an answer and writes a sample for copying in the notebook. Then she continues with dictation.
T: "Susy puts her jacket out in the sun ... Elita goes for a walk ... alone"
Sa: "She goes for a walk ... what, teacher?"
T: "Alone" (...) "Tomasa uses the cloak"
Many students ask at the same time, as they don't understand the sentence. The teacher asks for silence so they can listen and repeats the sentence. She then continues with additional sentences.
T: "Ana uses the kitchen ... My father eats bread"
Iris: Separated, isn't it, miss? (to me) ... with a small v?
T:"Tito .."
So: "kicks the ball"
T: "...takes out the spade" ... "The monkey eats *anona*"... "Acela walks alone" ... "Ana steers the canoe at the stern" ... "Manolo gets a bad grade" ... "Last one: Lina sews her jacket".
Someone asks her about the name in the sentence; the teacher answers, screaming L – I – N – A LINA!

[86] T indicates Teacher, S: students, Sa: Female student, So: Male student.

8:59 End of dictation. The children go to the teacher's desk to have their notebooks checked.

This fragment shows several characteristics of the ways literacy is commonly used in this classroom. First, the emphasis is on forms rather than on meaning, functions or purposes of writing. The objective is an adequate codification of sounds into letters. Second, the teacher introduces some grammatical rules (such as starting names with a capital letter), showing the objectified character of written language. Children show the same preoccupation with forms when asking about spelling (e.g. Iris). The lack of importance placed on meaning in this exercise is clearly exemplified by the selection of sentences themselves. They are not related with any topic; the only common element is the repetition of certain syllables,[87] although these syllables were not worked out as part of a lesson plan. The teacher does not explain words unfamiliar to the children (e.g. cloak), showing she is not interested in whether they understand the sentences.

The children, however, can go beyond the narrow objectives of this exercise. One boy tried to anticipate part of a sentence, adding an action and a direct object for it after hearing a name. He therefore produced a structurally correct sentence and also related the male name that teacher dictated to an activity common among male children (playing soccer). Nevertheless, the teacher paid no attention to his comment and continued dictating. In doing this, she showed that producing a sentence or anticipating the meaning of a written text was not part of her objectives. The purpose of writing in this activity becomes encapsulated. Writing is removed from the context of use and presented as an isolated technique. Literacy is also presented as a graded skill, and first graders (in the same room) need another activity as they cannot participate in this one because they lacking the required skills. The teacher must divide her time and attention between the two groups.

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[87] Lost in translation is the fact that most of the sentences proceed from a lesson about sa-se-si-so-su, as they use many words with these syllables or similar sounds (c or z). Original sentences in Spanish were: Elisa amasa la masa, Pepe toma su sopa, Camila toma su leche, Susy solea su casaca, Elita pasea sola, Tomasa usa la capota, Ana usa la cocina, Mi papá come bizcocho, Tito saca la pala, Acela camina sola, Ana popea la canoa, Manolo saca mala nota, Lina cose su casaca.

The use of literacy in this classroom rests mainly on mechanical activities like this one. Copying and dictation are the main uses, even on the few occasions when other subjects are being taught. In such cases, the children must copy the lesson contents written on the chalkboard.

Literacy teaching and learning strategies in this classroom remain largely based upon copying bits of written language. The emphasis is mainly on the development of coding and decoding skills. Meaning, purposes and uses of the written word are seldom addressed. Writing becomes an end in itself. The purpose of learning to write seems to be just to write, as the activities are not related to the communicative purposes or contexts of use of written language. In this way, literacy is presented as detached from the children's experiences.

2.1.2. Producing correct formats: Cesar and the upper grades

In general, the teachers focused less on writing production than on copying. One particular way of using writing is related to the reproduction of given formats. Teacher Olga, for example, delivered a lesson about the letter, presenting its formal parts and an example. Parameters were firmly established for the kind of document to be produced. The criteria for evaluation were the presence of formal components and formal language, rather than the letter's communicative purpose.

This was clear in looking at a letter produced by a child who received a poor grade (see Appendix 5). He communicated something to another person, expressing feelings and desires and imaginatively inventing a situation. But his letter did not fulfil the formal requirements established by the teacher and he received the lowest grade. The teacher did not explain what was wrong with the letter, nor did she correct spelling, handwriting or punctuation errors (although she did communicate a sense of failure to the student). Here the purpose of the exercise was to follow and reproduce a formal model, rather than to engage children in a communicative situation through a particular kind of text.

The same approach was observed in a lesson for grades 5 and 6 (see Appendix 6, excerpt 6.2), showing that the reproduction of formats does not disappear when children master coding and decoding skills, but become an

important school literacy event. Some elements of this lesson deserve mention. Teacher Cesar starts the lesson by trying to clearly establish the purpose of a particular kind of text (a receipt[88]) through a dialogue with the children. The text is familiar to them, as it is used in commercial activities at home and in the community. The teacher reinforces this commercial use of literacy in the dialogue and also reinforces a common perception about the power of literacy when he says that "papers speak," a common phrase that means that written documents have an authoritative voice, as they register agreements, transactions, legal rights, etc.

As the lesson progresses, however, there is a shift from the purposes and uses of this particular text to its formal characteristics. This shift moves the familiar text from its contexts of use towards a formalised treatment of its specific format, as an objectified device. The emphasis of the main part of the lesson is related to the production of correct text models. The teacher spends a large proportion of the lesson (75%) showing children the format and making them copy it. After copying, the activity is for the children to reproduce the same format six times. Copying is at the centre of the writing activity, and the writing production required of the children more closely resembles copying (as reproducing the model implies copying, but changing some data) than self-production of writing.

Both teachers, therefore, follow a similar pattern in their lessons. The purpose of a particular kind of text is addressed briefly at the beginning of the lesson, but the main objective (and the main part of the lesson) is to learn/memorise a text-format and reproduce it, following a model. Although the contents of a text are less important than its form, they also receive a highly formalised treatment. The social uses of such documents receive brief attention and less reflection, and are finally overwhelmed by the importance placed on format.

Although some writing production is required of children, the use of the written word in these cases still remains a copying exercise and model-memorising activity. Here literacy is not a meaningful activity related to the children's daily

[88] Receipt here refers to the document one gets when buying something.

experiences. Although the documents are familiar to them, beyond providing a few data and copying, they are not in involved in the production or use of text.

Teachers Olga and Cesar also ask for some writing production beyond formal models, but provide little instruction or guidance. These indications are also unclear. In one case (see Appendix 6, excerpt 6.3), the teacher first asked the children to write what they saw and did on a trip, but later told them to make up the content. The children worked on this task for approximately 40 minutes and no more comments or suggestions were given. The purpose of the activity appears to be simply to write, not to stimulate writing skills for description, reflection or to express something about the visit. Criteria for assessing the outcome of the exercise are not clearly stated. Once again, writing appears as an encapsulated activity.

2.1.3. Reading and understanding: Penny

Teacher Penny also worked with grades 5 and 6. In contrast with Olga and Cesar, Penny approached reading with an interest not only in reading aloud, but also in comprehension (see Appendix 6, excerpt 6.4). She made the children read aloud, but then read the material to them again and asked about the content. At the end of the lesson, she also asked for some writing production in the form of a summary of the reading (again with few instructions). There are some problems, however, in the kinds of reading comprehension strategies that Penny uses.

Her first strategy for encouraging reading comprehension, a general question about what the children had understood, was not very successful, as children told some parts of the story but not necessarily in order, and some of them did not answer the question. She did not ask questions during the reading, but stopped children who tried to comment on something they had already understood. When she began to ask more specific questions, however, the children were able to recall different parts of the story. And when she read the story a second time, stopping to ask questions or explain, they became more enthusiastically engaged and their answers were more accurate. The questions she asked were mainly literal, seeking bits of information from the story. There were no inferential questions to make the children reflect beyond

the specific content of the text. Nor did the teacher relate the content of the story with the children's experiences or context. Reading, therefore, appears as an isolated activity, although the emphasis on understanding moves the activity a step beyond from merely reading aloud.

2.1.4. Looking for meaning: Maria and Mario

In contrast with Penny, teacher Maria (grades 3 and 4) use reading in a more open way, building the meaning of the story through short explanations to the children as the reading proceeds, not only focusing on retention of facts, but also reflecting on the behaviour and features of the main characters. Later in the lesson, she also used the reading as a resource for an exercise, asking the children to produce sentences about the story.

Looking at her lesson (see Appendix 6, excerpt 6.5) we see that teacher Maria established the rules before starting the story: the children must listen carefully in order to understand. The reading is short, and Maria gets the children's attention by reading well, with short pauses for explanations and to review what had happened so far. She then engaged in a dialogue with the children, getting them to participate and avoiding examination-type questions that could make them feel shy. The dialogue was not based only on the facts of the reading, but also on things the children had learned from the story, and she tried to relate these with examples from daily life. Later in the lesson, the teacher approached the lesson topic (nouns and types of nouns) through concrete examples and tried to develop the concept of noun, which she finally wrote on the chalkboard. She asked for examples of nouns based on the reading, then had the children write sentences about the story and identify nouns.

In general, her lessons involve more participation by the children and have a more structured design, as activities are related more coherently, as in this example. She uses both group work and individual activities. She also used dictation, because she felt the children in her grades had fallen behind in this. She considers dictation as a way to improve children basic literacy skills. Because she had been trained in the NEP (see Chapter 3), however, she soon moved on to group work and made the children participate in exercises

such as the recognition of nouns in sentences and the creation and completion of sentences, activities involving more than simply copying exercises. This teacher also used language and math workbooks provided by Ministry of Education.

Teacher Mario, who also worked with grades 3 and 4, used similar strategies. Like Maria, he used an approach based more on dialogue to develop the contents of a particular lesson, involving children in the production of examples and explanations. Mario uses a greater variety of activities and resources than other teachers, however, such as maps, charts, books, workbooks, dialogue, writing exercises, calculation exercises with physical material, observation, drawing, reflection upon grammatical aspects of language, oral presentations and copying. Most of the activities are conducted through group work. Literacy is an important component of these activities. Whether children are looking at the map, identifying the names of departments, listing them, looking for their own department, producing a chart or copying verbs, they are using and practising their reading and writing skills. In these activities, one sees that literacy is used as a tool more than as an end in itself, corresponding to the teacher's interest in developing meaningful activities rather than mechanical exercises for practising reading and writing.

In examining the teaching and learning strategies, it becomes evident that learning at school appears mediated by written means, as writing plays a central role in school activities. Children are expected to acquire school knowledge mainly through written means. Despite the integrated vision of school knowledge that the NEP encourages, it remains compartmentalised: lessons correspond to particular subjects, as teachers clearly state before the beginning of each session. Literacy practices, however, range from very mechanical to more creative ones. The latter are clearly related to innovations promoted by the NEP, whilst the former fall within a more "traditional" approach to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, school literacy remains largely decontextualised from the children's experiences and firmly attached to its internal uses in school. It is treated as an object to be known or a skill to be mastered. Its communicative and social nature rarely appears, despite the emphasis the NEP has tried to introduce.

2.2. Multigrade classroom management

An analysis of multigrade classroom management practices among teachers shows that two strategies (teaching separate grade groups and whole class teaching) are predominant, although a third (a combination of both) is used by two teachers for some specific activities.

A view of literacy as a set of graded skills is the basis of the decision to split grades in the first and second grade classroom. The option does not seem to benefit grade 1 children very much,[89] however, as they receive less attention and more mechanical tasks, making their literacy learning rather tortuous, mechanical and almost empty of clear purpose beyond the mastery of coding and decoding skills. The whole class strategy seems to be more effective in the cases observed, as the teacher's time and support are not divided. It also allows for a more flexible approach to literacy. It engages children from different grades in same activities and expands their opportunities to experience peer tutoring and social interaction as part of their literacy learning process, especially with the use of working groups as part of whole class teaching. A combined strategy offers the benefits of whole class teaching, but also allows teachers to address the particular needs of each grade group.

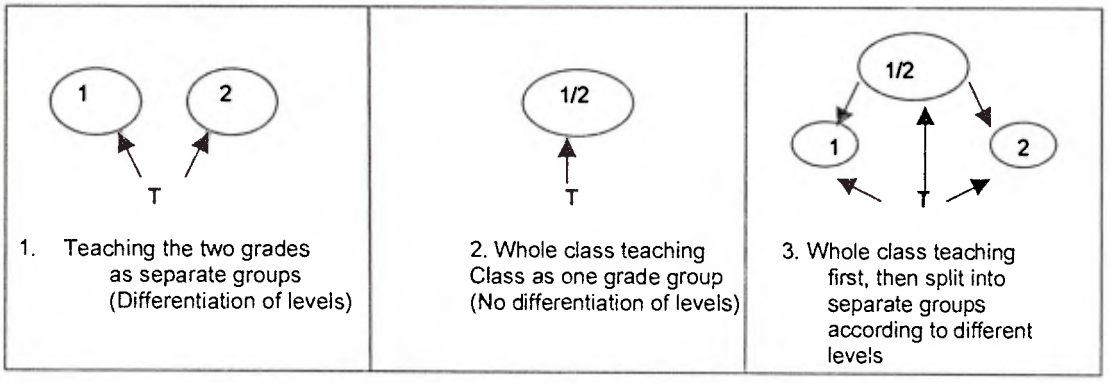
The three strategies are schematised in figure 6.1. In this section, I will discuss the characteristics, strengths and constraints of each and relate them to multigrade teaching methodologies developed in other contexts (see Chapter 3). For example, the teaching of separate grades is a central feature of the Multigrade Teaching Project of UNICEF/MOET in Vietnam, whilst the whole class approach is more common in projects such as *Cursos Comunitarios* in Mexico (Fuenlabrada et al, 1996). A combination of whole class teaching and differentiation by levels has been recommended by Collingwood (1991) and Cash (2000) as part of multigrade strategies and is also being explored by the UNICEF/MOET project in Vietnam (see Vu et al, 2002). These projects also use complementary strategies such as monitors, careful planning of time spent with each grade and self-learning strategies.

[89] Indeed, of the eight children in grade 1 that year, only two were promoted to grade 2 and only one of them was able to write and to read a bit.

The Peruvian teachers observed in this study had not been trained in multigrade methodology, so they had rely on their initiative and creativity to manage multigrade classrooms. While this resulted in approaches similar to those taken by teachers elsewhere, they could gain and improve their teaching if they could draw on knowledge of similar situations and alternative strategies.

The relative flexibility introduced by the NEP helps teachers try new strategies. The freedom to develop more suitable strategies is fruitful, as it enables teachers to explore and improve their own teaching. The complete lack of support or guidance, however, makes the task overwhelming for some. This suggests that while teachers do not need a step-by-step recipe, they do need orientation and opportunities to reflect upon what learning entails and the possibilities offered by multigrade classrooms. The following analysis of their strategies could be a first step in this direction.

Figure 6.1. Multigrade classroom management strategies



2.2.1. Teaching separate grades

The first strategy for managing multigrade classrooms treats each grade as a separate group; therefore each group has different activities. This strategy follows a monograde model and is most clearly used by Olga[90] (grades 1 and 2).

[90] Although this strategy is used by one of the five teachers at this school, it is widely seen among teachers in Peru, as previous research in other schools has shown (see Ames, 1999, 2001).

Conceptions about literacy and literacy levels among children influence this strategy, as the teacher herself recognises: For Olga, first graders must learn to write, whilst second graders already have some notions of this and can copy and write. She therefore feels forced to choose this strategy because of the students' different literacy levels.

A particular conception about literacy underlies this apparently forced choice. As literacy is seen as a set of hierarchical and graded skills, teaching must take into account the level of development of coding and decoding skills. Children who are learning to write do this through copying bits of written signs before proceeding to more complex activities, such as reading and writing texts. Children who already have some coding/decoding skills can copy longer passages and lesson contents and begin to read.

If literacy were understood as a communicative and social practice, however, children with different levels of coding and decoding skills could engage in joint activities, such as shared reading, producing written texts with the help of older children, etc. What seems inevitable to this teacher is only so because of her approach to literacy.

As a permanent way of managing multigrade classrooms, this strategy has limitations. The most obvious is that the teacher must divide her time and attention between two grades, so children receive less direct teaching and teacher support.

This situation becomes more problematic in cases like Olga's, when there is not a lesson plan that carefully outlines the time to be dedicated to each group. For example, the record for one day clearly shows an unequal distribution of time: of a total of three hours, 29 minutes were dedicated to common activities (worship, singing, roll call), while 33 minutes were dedicated to grade 1, 51 to grade 2 and 90 to grade 3.[91] First graders, therefore, received the least direct attention that morning.

[91] These activities add up to 3 hours and 25 minutes because part of the time (29 minutes) considered for grades 1 and 2 overlapped as the teacher was supporting both grades by checking notebooks, making a clear distribution of time for each grade impossible.

This situation would be less problematic if the children were engaged in some learning activities that did not require the teacher's attention. The first graders, however, frequently awaited attention for between 30 minutes and an hour. They spent most of the time copying syllables and words, a mechanical, time-consuming activity that could last the whole morning.

It can be question that children need direct teaching all the time and that they lose out if time is split between two groups. Good planning could allow the teacher to devise learning activities for each grade group and rotate among the groups to provide support. Similar amounts of time could be dedicated to each group, and time without direct teaching would be dedicated to learning activities that children could conduct in their own (see for example UNICEF/MOET, 1998). Self-learning is a strategy that has proven useful as a way of avoiding having children remain unattended and unengaged in activities; instead, they are engaged in learning without the teacher's direct supervision.[92] Another common strategy is to have some children act as monitors, directing the activity whilst teacher is busy with another group[93] (UNICEF/MOET, 1998; Collingwood, 1991).

A second limitation of this strategy is that it neither takes advantage of the students' diversity nor recognises peers as resources for learning. Because the children are engaged in separate activities, they do not support each other, but concentrate on their own grade's task. As explained above, multigrade teaching strategies have used monitoring from older children to help younger ones. Another fruitful use of children's diversity is group work in which older or more skilled children provide support for younger ones. Olga, however, does not use any of these strategies; nor does she encourage the children to support one another. Nevertheless, the children do this on their own, seeking support from peers who are also friends, siblings or cousins.

Children help each other largely on the basis of their own learning strategies outside school (see Chapter 5). Such support is made possible within the

[92] Self-learning has been developed especially as part of the *Escuela Nueva* program in Colombia and adopted by several projects in Latin America (see Psacharopoulus, 1992; Reimers, 1993; Ministerio de Educación de Guatemala, 1996; Subirats, 1991; Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 1974).

[93] This strategy was indeed observed in a one-teacher school in the area.

classroom because of the flexibility of seating arrangements. The students sit in rows that are not divided by grade and are free to choose their seats (see Appendix 7, sketch 1). They also can move freely about the classroom most of the time and seek help from older children. Some children also take initiatives to overcome grade divisions. One example is Vivian (grade 1), who decided on her own to undertake second-grade activities of which she felt capable. The teacher was flexible about such decisions.

2.2.2. Whole class teaching

The other four teachers mainly used the second strategy in their multigrade classrooms, treating both grades as one group and delivering the same activities to all, without differentiation. This option solves the problem of dividing time and attention between two groups, as all children received direct attention from the teacher almost all the time. It also saves time for the teachers, as they prepare only one lesson for the whole class. This way of managing the multigrade classroom is facilitated by the new curriculum structure, which groups two grades into one cycle and sets out a common group of competencies to be developed during a two-year cycle.[94] If curriculum contents are not carefully planned, however, the risk is that the children will study similar contents for two consecutive years. This is likely because of the constant turnover of teachers in multigrade schools (see Chapter 3).

Whole class teaching also addresses diversity in the classroom, making it an aid for teaching and learning. As children from different grades and abilities work together on the same topics and activities, they can support each other. This is particularly plausible when the seating pattern does not separate the children by grade, as was partly the case in grades 5 and 6 and even more possible when children worked in groups, as in the grade 3 and 4 classroom (see seating sketches in Appendix 7). Some teachers, such as Penny, Mario and Maria, recognise and encourage working groups as a useful strategy for encouraging children to support each other when doing a particular task.

[94] This applies to the five areas of development (or subjects). See Chapter 3.

In these arrangements, then, student diversity could enhance peer tutoring, either in same-grade or mixed-grade groups. The flexibility to allow children to talk and move around the classroom is also necessary for peer tutoring, especially when children are seated in rows. Although this flexibility is observed in some classrooms (Maria, Mario and Olga), in others children's movements and talking are more strictly controlled (Penny and Cesar), limiting the interaction and their possibility of receiving help from their classmates.

Literacy learning in particular gains greater flexibility in these arrangements. Once the children have some coding and decoding skills, teachers are not so worried about delivery of discrete skills by separating grades. Children of different grades and literacy levels can engage in the same activities and support one other.

There are some disadvantages, however, when the whole class teaching strategy is used most of the time. Collingwood (1991) points out that this approach is usually very teacher-centred. This is especially true in the case of Penny and Cesar, and less so in that of Maria and Mario, who combine teacher-centred approaches with group work. An additional disadvantage that Collingwood points out is that the entire lesson is aimed at the average child in the room. Differences of level (either across grades or within grades) are not addressed. Younger and/or lower-achieving children may fail to keep up with the work, whilst high achievers and/or older children may become bored if the activity is too easy for them. The same is true of the group work strategy, as observation showed that some children fail to appropriately carry out the activity, but their particular needs were obscured by the performance of the group as a whole. This demonstrates the need for individual attention and work as a complementary strategy for group work.

As Collingwood acknowledges, however, whole class teaching has an important place in multigrade classrooms and could work particularly well in some areas. He also points out some advantages of whole class teaching. One, which I mentioned when addressing peer interaction, is that working together for part of the day can improve children's relationships with one

other. Another is that the children benefit from an exchange of ideas, opinions and skills far broader than those in monograde classrooms, constituting an enriching experience for children at all levels.

2.2.3. Combining whole class teaching with level differentiation

A third strategy for managing multigrade classrooms combines activities for both grades as one group that is later divided to develop specific activities at different levels of complexity according to grade or level. This strategy is not predominant among any of San Antonio's teachers, but is sometimes used by Mario and Maria, especially when they develop the same topic for the whole group but also set extension activities, using graded workbooks for math and language or assigning mathematics exercises with different levels of complexity according to grade.

This strategy allows direct teaching of both grade groups and does not split the teacher's time or attention as the first strategy does. Because this strategy acknowledges different grade levels among children, it also allows the development of specific activities according to grade, in contrast with the second strategy. Differentiation of levels, however, is still tied to grade differences. There may also be level differentiation among children within the same grade, which is not recognised if specific activities are designed only on the basis of grade. To overcome this problem, Collingwood (1991) suggests the use of different criteria creating small groups according to different subjects and activities: mixed ability groups, same ability groups, same grade groups and social groups (by compatibility). These different groupings can be used not only to allow differentiated activities according to level (either within or across grades), but also to engage children in activities across levels.

Literature on multigrade teaching usually does not pinpoint a particular strategy as the most effective way of managing the multigrade classroom. Instead, it calls for flexibility, combining different strategies according to the characteristics of the topic, subject or activity (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997; Collingwood, 1991; UNESCO, 2001). As has been shown, each strategy has advantages and disadvantages. These have been presented in a general way, but the nature of the activity or topic also poses further

advantages or disadvantages. Certain strategies, such as work groups, may be useful at certain times, but individual learning needs also require attention, and group performance may conceal particular individual problems or achievements. Literacy learning also requires flexibility, because while children can engage in literacy activities beyond literacy levels, as individuals they approach literacy in different ways. Different children also master particular literacy skills at different paces, even in the same grade.

San Antonio's teachers tend to follow a single methodology instead of shifting from one strategy to another depending on the subject. Their approach to the multigrade classroom could benefit from a more flexible approach, but previous conceptions about teaching as instructional delivery still prevent some teachers from exploring the possibilities. The teachers' backgrounds and conceptions play an important role in their management of multigrade classrooms. This is explored in the next section.

3. Teachers' backgrounds and conceptions

Teachers approach their work with conceptions about what teaching and learning mean for them, with their particular backgrounds, with different training experiences and with different attitudes towards multigrade classrooms and rural students. This section explores how these different aspects are related to the teaching and learning strategies they use and the way they manage their multigrade classrooms. To organise the analysis, I employ two categories used by teachers themselves. They usually characterise teaching and learning strategies as "the traditional approach" when referring to such long-used strategies as copying, dictation and drill. They differentiate between this traditional approach and the "new approach" that the current reform is trying to introduce (i.e. the NEP). These two categories are not necessarily seen as clearly opposed or as radically different approaches to teaching and learning, since teachers usually refer they use "a combination" of the two approaches. In this section, I will discuss how teachers' backgrounds, training experiences and conceptions about learning and multigrade classrooms influence their strategies and position them closer to one approach or another.

3.1. Professional background and training

One of the most evident influences on teaching styles is the teachers' professional background and training. Those who have less formal professional training and less access to training courses seem to rely more on traditional teaching strategies. Those who had have access to more pre-service and in-service training seem to use a wider variety of strategies.

Teachers Olga and Cesar are examples of the more traditional group. Since they began teaching, both have had professional training in the form of summer courses.[95] Olga did not receive training in the NEP (just a short course), but Cesar did for two consecutive years (1996/1997). Nevertheless, he reports mixing new and traditional approaches to teaching. Classroom observation shows that a traditional approach plays a much more important part in both his teaching strategies and those of Olga.

Olga and Cesar have been teaching for many years (12 and 22 respectively) relying on the traditional strategies in which they were trained. It is not easy for them to make a radical change. The analysis of their teaching strategies in section 2.1 shows that both rely heavily on a teacher-centred approach, dictation and copying. These methods are the ones they know best and with which they feel most comfortable. The principles behind the NEP are not observable in their classrooms. A few training experiences do not seem to have produced a significant change in their teaching strategies.

More sustained training, however, could produce some changes. Mario, for example, has been teaching for 16 years. He has attended NEP training courses six times. Besides his professional pre-service training at the university, Mario has also had varied training and professional experiences: courses on school management, business administration and teaching in primary, secondary, urban and rural schools. These experiences have enriched his teaching and learning strategies and his understanding of the NEP.

[95] Cesar finished his course and obtained professional certification, but Olga did not complete the course.

Mario was the school's most highly trained teacher, and the variety of strategies he uses in the classroom reflects this: different educational materials and local resources, games and dynamics, indoor and outdoor activities were observed in his lessons. In the interview, he was the most articulate in explaining his lesson planning and its principles. Mario's wide range of training and practical experiences have led him to develop varied teaching and learning strategies closer to the NEP's requirements.

Younger teachers, such as Maria and Penny,[96] have been trained in the NEP not only through in-service courses but also in pre-service training. Maria in particular shows a good understanding of the kind of active learning strategies that the NEP promotes. She reports using an active method of teaching and learning, looking for different ways to spark children's understanding and interest. Although Penny knows several strategies promoted by the NEP, she said she does not apply it fully, but draws primarily on the traditional approach (observable in her classroom). Her reasons for choosing the traditional approach are related to a lack of materials. Maria also identifies the lack of materials as a difficulty:

> **Patricia**: Do you think that you can work with constructivist strategies, learning by discovery and so on here in the multigrade classroom? Or it is too difficult to apply this?
> **Maria**: To work in depth (with these strategies) no, I can't, because I need ... I used to work with many materials, with printed sheets, and here (parents) do not collaborate. They don't provide you with certain things. They don't provide some of the materials I have requested. There are many things that prevent that, although if the economy were better it would be good, because these children do think, ask and talk. If all these things (materials) were available, it would be wonderful.

All teachers often stress lack of suitable materials[97] as an obstacle to implementing new strategies. Educational materials are indeed an important aid for teachers, and lack of resources is a problem in multigrade schools. NEP's central feature, however, is not the use of particular kinds of materials, but a different approach to teaching and learning. The fact that teachers place overwhelming importance on specific materials for conducting specific

[96] Both are in their 20s; they graduated from pre-service professional training in 1997 and 1996, respectively

[97] For example, large sheets of paper, felt-tip pens, exercise sheets and cards with words, syllables and letters.

activities (but without using other materials they have, such as the classroom library) and return to traditional ways of teaching if they are not available is revealing. It shows that teachers (even those who are more familiar with the strategies introduced by the NEP) are more concerned with the practicalities of implementing new strategies than with reflecting on upon what learning entails under this new approach. It could also reveal that training courses have mainly stressed such practicalities instead of involving teachers in reflection about learning.[98]

San Antonio's teachers have different backgrounds. The duration and quality of their training, previous teaching experience, professional background and motivation influence how teachers understand the NEP and the resources and strategies they use in the classroom. The teachers also face a pedagogical situation not considered in their training: the multigrade classroom. Their attitudes towards this situation also influence their teaching.

3.2. Perceptions of multigrade teaching

In general, teachers consider the multigrade classroom a difficult situation for various reasons. Some are related to the view of the monograde classroom as the normal model of school organization, while others have to do with lack of preparation in multigrade methodology and lack of resources.

Assuming that the monograde model is **the** model for instructional organization, teachers Cesar and Olga consider the multigrade classroom as an inadequate educational setting. Cesar expressed this view clearly when the school lost one teacher and he had to teach four grades for several days:

> If I had 100 students from a single grade, I could work, but this way, with several grades at the same time, I couldn't. (...) It's a problem to have so many grades. We can't do anything in this situation. The only solution is to get another teacher. (Cesar)

The main problem that Cesar identifies is the diversity of grades. He considers it easier to have 100 students doing the same activity than to organize different activities with small groups of children of different grades.

[98] As this study did not focus on the national training program, further research should take

This reveals a more traditional approach to teaching, in which all students are doing the same activities at the same time. Olga also compares multigrade with monograde classrooms, considering the former "not good" for learning since children "don't get the same" as in the latter. Their negative attitude toward the multigrade classroom does not help these teachers try different strategies or consider the pedagogical possibilities of diversity in the classroom. They rely in traditional monograde strategies, either treating the two grades as one (Cesar) or addressing them as two monograde classes in one room (Olga).

Lack of previous training in multigrade teaching is another reason why the multigrade classroom is difficult for teachers:

> **Maria:** It was the first time I'd been (in a multigrade classroom), and I didn't know where to start, what I should plan, what I should do, how I should teach.
> **Patricia:** Didn't you have any course in the teachers' college?
> **Maria:** No, never. I told you, the reality of this work is completely different. Now I understand; now I'm concerned about it, about how to work with six grades in a single-teacher school (...) I asked (colleagues) what I should do. Because they had experience, they told me do this or do that, do search. I'll try, anyway, because it's my classroom.

Maria and Penny expressed the tensions that new teachers face when approaching a situation for which they have not been trained. They actively search for ways to manage the situation: asking more experienced colleagues, trying different strategies and facing their initial confusion and limited resources. Teachers are active in creating strategies for managing multigrade classrooms. The outcome, discussed in section 2.2, shows many features developed by other teachers and educational projects elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the unusual nature of the situation and the perception that the multigrade classroom is not "normal" lead some teachers (Olga, Cesar, Penny) to rely more on traditional teaching strategies than on those proposed by the NEP. Instead of identifying the potential of the multigrade classroom, the stress is on its limitations, either because of the diversity of students and curriculum programs or the lack of materials.

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into account the ways in which teachers are trained.

In contrast, Mario shows a much more positive attitude in his belief that the multigrade classroom is not a worse educational setting than the monograde classroom. He reports a variety of strategies that can be used even with four or six grades: monitors from grade 6 can help third graders, older children can read to younger ones, and peer tutoring can be implemented. He points out another important issue, however: the role of the teacher, who must define the contents and objectives and do appropriate, timely and precise planning according to grade levels.

> **Mario:** The teacher needs to have a specific and suitable understanding of what he wants. He must be clear about what he wants and maintain a balance to ensure that neither of the two grades loses out.

In his work with two grades, he places importance on planning, peer tutoring (i.e. group work) and (less frequently) differentiation of levels (i.e. using graded workbooks). The difficulty he points out is lack of materials, a constraint due to the school's and the parents' poverty.

Teachers' perceptions about the multigrade classroom as a pedagogical environment, therefore, influence their choices for teaching. Mario, who has a more positive view of the multigrade classroom, is able to identify and imagine a wider range of teaching and learning activities, which are observable in his lessons. Teachers such as Olga and Cesar, who have a negative view of multigrade classrooms, use a much more restricted range of teaching and learning strategies and rely heavily on copying and dictation. Penny and Maria point out the lack of appropriate training and their own ongoing search for ways to work in multigrade classrooms.

3.3. What to teach

Teachers' conceptions about what the school should provide to children are also related to the teaching strategies they use. Those who show a preference for the traditional approach stress the importance of acquiring basic skills, whilst those who show a preference for the NEP are concerned not only with basic skills, but also with developing children's understanding.

Taking into consideration the kind of knowledge their students need, teachers Olga, Cesar and Penny, for example, emphasise the importance of literacy, basic mathematics and good behaviour:

> The most important thing is reading and writing. But it is also important that they learn to behave well in the classroom and in public, and how to be organised. Some children misbehave. It's worse now that we can't do anything; we can't give them a smack. That's forbidden. ... They also need addition, subtraction, the (multiplication) table to avoid of being cheated (Olga).

In the primary grades, school knowledge is mainly related to literacy and basic mathematics. It is also the basis for secondary and post-secondary education, as well as for adult life.

> **Penny:** Even if you don't get a higher education, I tell them, at least you can teach your children. How can you ask your children to read if you don't know how to read or write? What will you will teach if you don't know? You must learn at least for that. The goal is to make something of oneself.

These conceptions of literacy and schooling closely resemble those of villagers (see Chapters 4 and 5). Teachers also tend to believe that literacy is important for the future rather than for the present, and assume literacy and basic mathematics as the main outcomes of primary school.

This view of school knowledge helps explain why Penny, like Olga and Cesar, and despite her training, chooses a more traditional approach to teaching. It seems to be enough for the goals she sets for her students. It also seems that, although she knows some new teaching and learning strategies, her conception of learning remains traditional.

In contrast, teachers Mario and Maria are interested in teaching the children to reason and think. They recognise that while important, reading and writing are not the only things that matter.

> **Mario:** Children need other things too. They need values. They need to interpret the world in which they live. Otherwise, they won't be prepared (to face it) (..) It is useless to put something in front of a child if he doesn't know how to interpret what he reads. (...) The child needs to observe, analyse, compare. (...) It is necessary to emphasise interpretation, to have something in the brain.

The differences among these teachers' notions of learning and the purpose of school are notable. Whilst some place greater emphasis on the acquisition of skills such as literacy and numeracy, and see the role of school as providing them, others believe the school must not only teach these skills, but also develop children's thinking, interpretation and comprehension skills.

Ideas about learning also differ among teachers. Penny relates learning to hard work and the notion of "sacrifice" and "suffering." In the classroom, she encourages children to solve exercises on the chalkboard saying: *"You have to go (to the chalkboard). That's the way you learn — by suffering."*

Penny views not only children's learning but also her own learning process as hard work. Sacrifice and suffering are part of her own educational experiences, and she approaches teaching and learning with this view, demanding hard work from the children. This helps explain her emphasis on control and regulations in her class, the scant use of play as part of the lessons and the use of physical punishment.[99]. Learning does not necessarily need to be enjoyable, since it is hard work and demands sacrifice from the learner. This contrasts greatly with Mario's constant use of play and Maria's emphasis on developing enjoyable learning activities for children.

3.4. Between "traditional" and "new" approaches

This section has related differences in classroom practices (analysed in section 2.1) with teachers' backgrounds, training experiences, attitudes towards the multigrade classroom and conceptions about learning at school. It has shown that various factors shape teachers' performance. Teachers who have more training (i.e. Mario and Maria) tend to use a wider range of strategies and look for active ways to approach learning, an approach more in line with the NEP. They also take advantage of some of the possibilities that the NEP offers for multigrade classrooms (i.e. working groups, peer tutoring, use of recently provided educational materials). These teachers emphasise the need to develop thinking and meaningful experiences for children and to design structured and enjoyable learning activities. They identify limitations to

[99] All teachers but Mario use physical punishment.

achieving these goals, however, such as lack of materials and lack of guidance and training in multigrade teaching.

Teachers who have less training tend to draw mainly on traditional strategies that emphasise drill, repetition and memorising, which have been criticised by the NEP. For these teachers, learning focuses on the "basics": reading, writing and basic mathematics. They stress the need to provide children with skills without going beyond them. A negative attitude toward multigrade classrooms is also observable in these teachers, impeding the possibility of exploring other strategies and identifying the potential of multigrade teaching. Different factors, therefore, intertwine to shape teachers' strategies and the ways they manage multigrade classrooms.

The teachers themselves describe their teaching strategies as framed in "traditional" and "new" approaches, talking about these approaches as if they were two poles of a continuum rather than radically opposed. They say, for example, "I don't use the new approach that much" (*no uso tanto el nuevo enfoque*), implying a degree of intensity. It should be noted, however, that "traditional" strategies such as dictation, drill and repetition are linked with conceptions of teaching and learning that are opposed to those underlying the "new" approach (i.e that knowledge can be transmitted from teacher to student, rather than knowledge as actively constructed by individuals or groups). The concepts coexist, but not necessarily on equal terms. When asked about literacy learning, for example, teachers showed a mix of contrasting ideas about how this process is best achieved, and their practices reveal that one set of conceptions is much more in play than the other.

3.4.1. Literacy learning: what model is being used?

As part of their second interview, teachers Olga, Maria and Penny were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with various items on a questionnaire. Their answers showed overlapping conceptions about literacy learning that stem from different literacy learning paradigms (cf. Chapter 1). Some are observable in classroom practices, whilst others are not, although the teachers do agree on their importance.

For example, the teachers agree that literacy is a communicative practice developed through the use that people make of it. They recognise that it is necessary to develop meaningful literacy activities with a clear purpose of writing and reading rather than direct teaching of writing skills. The emphasis on meaning for literacy learning appears to be crucial. They also agree on the central importance of taking the children's context into account to enhance the literacy learning process. Finally, they recognise that children engage in literacy learning through discovery and experimentation with the written word.

These conceptions, which belong to emergent and social constructivist approaches to literacy learning and are encouraged by the NEP (cf. Chapter 3), consider children to be active meaning makers in the literacy learning process and place it in the immediate social context in which the children experience such learning.

Nevertheless, the teachers also hold conceptions that belong to earlier developmentalist and connectivist models[100] that are consistent with a "traditional" approach. In this approach, children are seen as passive recipients, while teachers deliver exercises to master discrete skills until children master the complete set through repetition and drill.

Although teachers reject the idea of starting literacy learning with teaching the alphabet, therefore, they agree that to teach literacy it is necessary to divide these abilities in successive steps in which children learn letters, syllables and words, and then to form sentences. They also believe that children must practice writing letters before they begin writing words. Finally, they believe that coding and decoding skills are central to the literacy learning process.

These conceptions are based on an approach that sees literacy as a set of hierarchical skills that have to be learnt in a graded way. A developmental concept of learning also underlies this view, and the teachers agree that all children follow the same stages of literacy learning.

[100] See Chapter 1 for a presentation of these approaches

These conceptions, however, have been criticised by proponents of the social constructivist approach. The place of context and meaning in literacy learning seems to become lost with this emphasis on teaching and practising coding and decoding skills.

Section 2.1 showed that at a practical level, this second set of conceptions is the one that most clearly orients teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Although teachers clearly know and agree with social constructivist conceptions, they do not fully apply them in the classroom. Their practice seems to be guided (with some variation among teachers) by a general view of literacy learning that centres on the mastery of graded, mechanical skills.

This clearly has implications for the way they approach multigrade classrooms. All but one of the teachers believe that diversity among children poses a difficulty for literacy teaching and learning. In a communicative, meaning-centred approach, diversity is not necessarily an obstacle, but is seen as having the potential to enhance literacy learning. From a perspective that sees literacy as a rigid set of graded skills that must be delivered to different groups according to grade, however, diversity in the multigrade classroom represents a problem. This assumption implies that a monograde classroom lacks diversity and that all children of the same grade and age progress at the same pace, an assumption that has also been extensively criticised in educational research.

These last examples bring us again to the particular context in which the teachers work, a context of change in which new approaches to teaching and learning are being introduced. Not only do the teachers hold earlier conceptions about teaching, but these views also orient their classroom practice. At a practical level, they play a much more important role than the principles underlying the NEP. Moreover, although some teachers have adopted new teaching and learning strategies, conceptions of learning in general and of literacy learning in particular do not seem to be changing at the same pace. The teachers are using a mix of methods drawn from their previous familiarity with the "traditional" approach as well as their training in

the "new" approach. In doing so, they try to find better ways to ensure that children learn, even if the strategies come from different perspectives.

The problem, however, does not lie only in the kind of strategies the teachers know and use. Literature on literacy learning, while emphasising different strategies at different points to achieve better results, seems to recognise that there is no single model for teaching, but that different strategies can be used fruitfully according to learning objectives. Different methods, however, are valid and valuable only when used in combination (Gregory and Williams, 2000: 10[101]).

In San Antonio's school, despite the mixing of strategies by some teachers, there is a predominance of traditional methods for literacy learning (i.e. copying, drill). Although a more rigorous evaluation would be needed to determine the effects of such strategies on the children, first graders did not benefit in their acquisition of literacy: six of the eight children in grade 1 were not promoted because they did not acquire sufficient literacy skills. When asked to write a story, first and second graders responded they could not do it. It was also possible to observe that at least three children in grade 3 and one in grade 4, although able to copy what was written on the chalkboard and do copying exercises assigned as homework, were not able to write a single word on their own without a sample.[102] This indicated that a strategy that relies excessively on copying can develop this skill without developing the ability to write autonomously.

This does not mean that children cannot learn with the use of traditional strategies (although they show several limitations), as some children do learn some skills. Nor does it imply that the NEP enhances children's learning, since this plan is not being fully applied in this school and its effects could not be observed. What is possible to observe is that children become more involved and motivated when more active strategies are used, and this in turn

[101] Gregory and Williams point out that such an approach, which sought a syncretism of most earlier methods, was developed in the 1990s. They use as an example the interactionist model, which uses four types of knowledge — grapho-phonic, lexical, syntactic and semantic — instead of a single type.

[102] Their reading skills were also minimal, as they were unable to match letters with their corresponding sound.

may have a positive influence on their learning. Based on their study of different generations of learners, Gregory and Williams (2000) point out that the literacy learning method itself is not the only factor in literacy acquisition; the teacher's knowledge, motivation, expectations and respect for the children also play an important role. Throughout this chapter, it has been shown teachers' attitudes toward the educational situation they face (i.e. multigrade), their training experiences and their teaching goals also influence the kinds of strategies they use.

The mixing of strategies, however, and the perception that the educational perspectives underlying these strategies are part of a continuum instead of opposed suggest that teachers do not perceive radical differences between such perspectives. This raises a question: do teachers need only a set of strategies, or do they need a deeper understanding of the approach to learning that such strategies entail? It seems that new strategies offered by in-service training are not enough; also needed is reflection upon the teachers' practice, knowledge and conceptions about the educational context in which they work. Technical training, therefore, must be accompanied by ways of fostering the teachers' development as educators so they can identify and use the many situations that can promote children's learning. This is especially important for the way teachers view the children's social context, as we will see below.

3.5. Children's context in learning process: towards a devalued view?

The NEP strongly encourages using the children's social and cultural context as the point of departure for the learning process (see Chapter 3). This, however, is rarely observed in classroom practices. When it does appear, it entails only a superficial reference to objects or the landscape of the children's life, not the many social and cultural practices of the people themselves. This absence appears to be related to the teachers' negative view of rural parents and the children's social context, which is common in rural schools (Uccelli, 1999; Ames, 1999). Teachers construct a discourse about parents that emphasises their lack of interest in their children's education, their lack of schooling, their poverty and their failure to co-operate

with the school. They consider the rural context a major obstacle to the children's learning, not a resource for it.

Mario points to the parents' ignorance, alcoholism and unemployment[103] and the general context as obstacles to children's learning. He expresses this view in informal conversation even when parents are present:

> Mario asks me to take his classroom next week, as he has a training course. He encourages me, saying it is not necessary to give the children too much. "In the city, parents know what their children must study and they demand it". Ms. Rose adds, "Here we're happy with what (the teachers) give (the children) in their notebooks." Mario stresses that in the city, the parents were engineers, underscoring the different social and professional status of San Antonio's villagers. *(Ms. Rose's house. Field notes 15/11/00)*

Mario seems to believe that rural parents do not know what their children must study, in contrast with urban, professional parents. They lack the educational qualifications to know what they can demand from teachers. Therefore it is not necessary to give these children much. He does not feel accountable to these parents as he did to urban parents. A comparison that stresses differences in social and professional status and commitment between urban and rural parents also appears among other teachers:

> **Maria:** Parents' participation with regard to their children is very different (here). It's not the same (as in the city). There they are dedicated to their children; they help in a more focused way, they're more responsible. Here you don't see much of that; you have to demand so much to get something.

This negative view is also expressed in official pedagogical and administrative documents produced for local educational authorities. Among the objectives of annual planning for 2001, both Olga and Maria write the following, assuming that the opposite is currently true:

> Objectives:
>
> 1. To make parents become interested in their children's education and give children more attention to develop themselves in a satisfactory way.

[103] Such statements seem overly general. Alcoholism was observed among three parents out of 50. Unemployment does not really exist, since all parents engage in fishing and/or agriculture. Ignorance is related to lack of schooling, a questionable assumption.

In documents about the "contextualisation of the curriculum" (Olga, Penny), two cross-cutting issues identified are "family break-up" and "parents' indifference to the teaching and learning process." In Olga's annual planning for 2001, the section about "problematic features" depicts children as belonging to households with "family problems" and "precarious economic status."

This discourse about parents, therefore, is translated into a pathologic view of the children's social context. In fact, however, based on observed characteristics (see Chapter 5), local families, which are mainly nuclear or extended, appear rather stable. Single mothers live in their own nuclear families, rather than alone. The teachers' emphasis on family break-up seems exaggerated. The same is true of family problems; while there are some, of course, this is not the general case.

Poverty is indeed a common feature among families, but this does not necessarily imply that the parents are uninterested in their children's education. Chapter 5 showed that all parents share a strong commitment to supporting their children's schooling and literacy learning. They provide material resources for their children to attend school, and many help their children with their homework. Some parents have more educational resources for helping their children, but even parents with little or no schooling can manage supportive strategies (e.g. sibling involvement). Finally, parents do the maintenance of the school building and provide educational materials for children and teachers, contradicting the teachers' criticism of their lack of co-operation.

The teachers' negative view of the children's context appears to be based upon preconceived notions of rural villagers. In addition, the parental behaviours and attitudes that the teachers seek seem to be shaped by an "ideal" image based mainly on urban, professional, middle-class parents. Teachers are unable to recognise the different ways in which rural parents do care about their children's education.

This negative view has practical consequences for teaching: teachers are not able to identify positive features in local knowledge. They cannot use the

children's context as part of the learning process, because they regard this context as "backward." This also reflects an attitude that gives school knowledge a status superior to that of local knowledge. And teachers, as educated, more urban people, consider themselves superior to parents, reproducing notions of social hierarchy that are widespread in the region and the country.[104]

It should be noted, however, that despite the negative view of parents and the children's context, teachers hold a positive view of the children themselves. They believe their students can learn, but that they face several obstacles. This contrasts with what has been observed in Andean multigrade schools for indigenous populations (Ames, 1999). There, ethnic differences among teachers and students play an important role in the construction of a view of students as intrinsically disadvantaged and poor learners because of their indigenous identity. In the San Antonio school, there are no strong ethnic differences between teachers and students,[105] but social differences do play a role in how the teachers view parents and the children's social context. This view clearly prevents them from using the local context in the children's literacy learning process.

4. Literacy practices among teachers

The teachers' own literacy practices outside the classroom appear to be related to their teaching. This section discusses such practices and their impact on teaching.

The range of practices that teachers reported was related to their daily activities and their professional roles as teachers. In everyday life, they write shopping lists, and those who own small shops (Olga, Maria) also read commercial catalogues and fill out order forms. They occasionally read newspapers and magazines, and some (Maria, Olga) mentioned literary books, although they acknowledge having few. Only Penny mentioned writing

[104] This appears to be related to the hierarchical view of relationships among social groups in the region, as explored in Chapter 4.
[105] All the teachers are *mestizos*. They are from other towns and cities in the Amazon, except for Penny, who is from the Andes.

letters to relatives, but she, like the others, prefers the telephone for long-distance communication. Maria uses the Internet in the city, mainly for chatting and email.

Teachers also use literacy in relation to their teaching. They read school textbooks to prepare their lessons (e.g. encyclopaedias, short stories, mathematics problems). Mario mentioned reading about pedagogy and the NEP and he owns some books on this topic. Teachers write a classroom diary of lesson plans (every two or three days, once a week or less frequently), as well as Learning Units (each month) outlining the month's main activities and competencies. The most intensive writing is related to administrative demands (the Learning Units and Annual Plan are part of these requirements). The teachers read and write many different bureaucratic documents, such as letters, reports, requests and official communications. They must also write down school regulations and fill out several official documents (enrolment lists, grade booklets, official evaluation records, list of children who pass, fail or withdraw, etc.). A substantial amount of time is devoted to preparing this administrative and bureaucratic paperwork and submitting it to educational authorities.

During the collaborative work with the teachers, they were provided with reading material about multigrade classroom strategies. The teachers' use of this material revealed additional characteristics of their literacy practices. Although the reading material was explained, read and discussed collectively during our meetings, the teachers did not read it either before or after the meetings, at least during the joint work process. The reason was not that they did not consider the material useful. On the contrary, they were very enthusiastic when they first saw it, and once they became familiar with the contents of the modules through the meetings, they valued the information they contained:

> **Maria**: If we get to know all of this (contents of the modules), we'll be experts!
> **Patricia:** Well, it's still working material
> **Penny**: But it helps
> **Patricia**: Yes, it helps. .... Sometimes it seems like too much, doesn't it? To read everything...

Maria: Yes, but one doesn't know how much one can get out of it (LH2)

The reason that the teachers did not read the material outside the sessions was related to their own reading habits. In fact, they spontaneously acknowledged that they do not read frequently:

> **Penny**: I don't read very much. I get tired. ... When I was a student, I had to read, but it was hard for me. I'd get headaches, but after awhile I got used to doing it. My diet also affected it. ... (My mom) gave me milk, quinua, apples. She cooked those things and I ate them.[106]

Teachers read school textbooks when preparing lessons or required administrative documentation. It seems, however, that reading for their own professional development, reading about pedagogy and methodology, or even reading the books in their own classroom libraries is not a common practice. Only one teacher reported doing such reading, but the three teachers participating in the action research did not use reading in this way.

Without generalising, this raises an important point. The quotations above and the collaborative work with teachers imply that teachers do not systematically use reading as a tool for their own learning, and this seems to influence the way teachers approach their teaching. They rarely encouraged their students to read to gain new information and improve their understanding. This suggests a parallel between the teachers' own literacy practices and the way they teach their students.

Writing practices showed a similar pattern. Teachers used journals that were provided for them to write down the information presented during our sessions or their lesson plans. These could be considered the "contents of the session." The teachers, then, mirrored the writing practices they asked of their students (i.e. copy the contents of the lesson). In doing so, they probably continued the practice they acquired as students in both schooling and professional training. The teachers never used the journals to write down their own impressions of and reactions to the action research, which was suggested when the notebooks were provided. Writing for self-expression and self-reflection was not part of their writing practices. This corresponds to what

[106] Products considered nutritional and important for physical fitness and, especially, mental concentration.

was observed in their classrooms. Their students are constantly asked to write, but this mainly consists of copying the contents of the lesson, reproducing a given format or practice exercises, but rarely involves developing the children's ability to express themselves.

Teachers, then, appear to base their classroom uses of literacy on their uses of literacy outside the classroom. Because of the administrative paperwork required of them, teachers understand the importance of being able to deal with various formats for formal communication. In their classrooms, therefore, they deliver text-formats and ask the children to reproduce and copy those formats until they learn them. In their educational experience, the teachers seem to have been taught to write down what they are expected to learn, and this is the way they use writing when facing new knowledge. In their classroom, they ask the same kind of behaviour of their students. Finally, teachers do not read frequently for self-learning; nor do they encourage their students to do so inside or outside the classroom.

There seem to be an assumption that as a result of their own educational process, teachers have the kind of literacy skills and practices that the new curriculum seeks to develop among students (literacy for communication, to gain new information, for continuous learning, for self-expression, etc.). This assumption, however, fails to recognise that teachers may not have developed those practices and skills. It is more difficult for them to teach something they have not learned and practised. This assumption also fails to recognise that teachers are partly the product of the educational system they have experienced. As we have seen, this experience strongly shapes their classroom practice.

5. Discussion and conclusion: school literacy practices

This chapter has analysed different aspects of the use of literacy in San Antonio's multigrade school. From visual traces of printing in the classroom to teaching and learning strategies, the centrality of literacy in the school has become evident. The teachers' conceptions about multigrade classrooms, school knowledge, literacy learning and the children's social context have

been also explored to show how all these aspects influence their teaching strategies. A set of practices and beliefs that shapes the uses of reading and writing in the multigrade classroom emerges from this account. They are also related to the teachers' own literacy practices, raising the problems and challenges that these pose for teacher training and the new reform.

Indeed, despite the NEP's claims (cf. Chapter 3), the study clearly shows that literacy is not treated as a "communicative object." Communicative uses of reading and writing are clearly marginal at this school. Instead, there is an emphasis on literacy as a set of skills that children must master through drill and repetition. The use of literacy is central to school activities, but appears encapsulated in the school. Either as a mean for acquiring school knowledge or as the main skill to be learned at school, literacy seems to be confined within the classroom walls.

This does not mean that literacy is considered useful only at school. Indeed, teachers state clearly that children will need literacy for their lives outside school. Here they agree with parents about literacy's "importance for the future". Actual uses of literacy at school, however, do not relate it to the children's experiences outside the classroom. The emphasis is on the acquisition of a skill, and school literacy becomes an end in itself. Literacy's social uses, its communicative purposes and its instrumental uses for acquiring knowledge and information beyond school lessons appear only marginally, usually through the memorisation of a model text.

The written word is presented as being detached from its context of use, as an object to be known and mastered through particular techniques. Some teachers emphasise mechanical techniques based on repetition, whilst some others look for more active ones. All, however, treat the written word in the same objectified, detached way. This is perhaps the most salient feature of school literacy. It must therefore be made not only part of these teachers' practices, but part of the approach that the school as an institution takes to the written word.

Teachers differ in their concepts of what learning entails for them. Some emphasise meaning and thinking as central goals, whilst others emphasise

the mastery of basic skills. All, however, agree on a concept of literacy as a set of graded skills. As has been shown, this entails particular constraints for multigrade classroom preventing teachers from taking greater advantage of the diversity they have in the classroom. Diversity is addressed either by trying to split the groups based on grade or trying to erase such differences through a whole class approach that does not differentiate among levels. A combination of the two strategies emerges slightly in some classrooms, but it is not fully developed.

The differences in the teaching and learning strategies the teachers use and the ways they manage the multigrade classroom must be understood in a context of change in the entire educational system. Teachers are facing new ways and concepts of teaching and learning, but also are drawing on their previous experiences and conceptions. An examination of teachers' current practices shows the predominance of elements associated with traditional strategies, such as copying, dictation, drill and the mastery of skills through repetition. Although some teachers combine these strategies with more active ones in a "mixed" model, the NEP's central features, such as the active role of learners, the importance of social context in literacy learning and the exploration of the many uses and purposes of the written word appear rarely if at all in the teachers' practices.

This inevitably focuses attention on the contents and procedures of teacher training, raising an important question: Why does this training fail to challenge teachers' previous conceptions about learning and literacy learning? Although some teachers are incorporating new teaching strategies, previous notions of literacy learning are still present and play a more important role in teaching practices. By ignoring the context in which the teachers work, the multigrade school, this training also fails to realise the potential of this type of classroom and to provide resources for working with it. The analysis of teachers' literacy practices also shows that this training asks teachers to deliver a set of competencies with which they are not necessarily familiar. Finally, despite the importance placed by the NEP on children's previous knowledge and their social context, teachers see this context not as useful for learning, but as an obstacle.

The exploration of different domains in the children's lives, with a focus on literacy practices, has shown that there are many situations that can foster and be useful for children's literacy learning in multigrade classrooms. They remain largely invisible to teachers, however, because of the teachers' negative view of the children's social context. This view is largely shaped by preconceptions related not only to social differences in the wider society, but also to a hierarchical view of school knowledge and procedures as intrinsically superior to local knowledge and local ways of learning.

In a context of changing educational practices in the school system, in which different educational paradigms are in play, it is difficult for teachers to change their practices without changing the deeper conceptions that underlie those practices. The changes that the NEP is trying to introduce challenge traditional approaches that are deeply rooted in teachers' practices. How a change of such magnitude could be developed to enhance multigrade teaching practices is a question underlying the action research study analysed in next chapter.

San Antonio' multigrade school

San Antonio' multigrade school

CHAPTER 7:

WORKING TOGETHER: ACTION RESEARCH AT SCHOOL

Introduction

The analysis of literacy instructional strategies at San Antonio's school in Chapter 6 showed that they rely heavily on rote learning, drill and repetition. Some teachers, however, introduce more active strategies. Interested in the development of more meaningful and effective strategies, I engaged in collaborative work with teachers. The work offered the possibility of strengthening active strategies already used by some teachers and sharing them with others in an attempt to overcome the emphasis on rote learning. The intervention also tried to introduce literacy learning strategies suitable for multigrade classrooms.

This chapter focuses on the action research undertaken with three teachers in San Antonio. The purpose of the chapter is to analyse the joint process more than to follow changes in the teachers' practices over time, although these are also considered.

The joint work with San Antonio's teachers was conceived as action research. This approach was appealing because of its collaborative character. Massive in-service training for teachers seemed limited in its possibilities for effectively introducing new teaching strategies. Working closely with teachers could reveal their particular training needs while exploring the potential of action research as an alternative form of teacher training.

The first section presents the factors that influenced and shaped the design of the intervention, the design itself and the methodology used. The second section analyses the main findings and impacts of the action research process. The final discussion considers how the intervention demonstrates the potential and limitations of action research as a means of in-service training and professional development for teachers.

1. Design and methodology

1.1. Preliminary considerations: factors affecting the design

Several factors that influenced the design of the intervention are explained in this section. First, I consider the importance of literacy for teachers (which matched the focus of the study), the lack of multigrade training and teachers' training interests. Second, the process of negotiation about ways of working together and my role as facilitator is discussed within the framework of current models for action research. Finally, the time constraints faced in carrying out the intervention are briefly addressed.

1.1.1. Defining the focus of the intervention: the importance of literacy

Literacy learning was one of the main concerns of teachers (see Chapter 6) as well as parents (see Chapter 5). Literacy constitutes foundational knowledge upon which other subjects and activities can be developed. Despite this emphasis, low achievement in literacy was of constant concern to teachers. It was likely, therefore, that teachers would be interested in an intervention focused on literacy. The link with multigrade methodology could be also welcomed given the lack of training in this area. Nevertheless, I wanted to determine to the greatest extent possible the teachers' interests in such an intervention and meet their needs.

An inquiry among teachers showed that they were interested in further training in a variety of areas. The interests were diverse and related to personal characteristics and motivations. Olga for example, having the challenge of teaching the initial grades, was interested in literacy learning and children's learning in general. Cesar wanted to know more about the new approach. Mario was interested in self-esteem workshops, interpersonal relationships, working groups, strategies for implementing a parents' school and strategies for improving teachers' learning. Penny expressed interest in literacy strategies. Maria was keen to learn more about psychology and was considering further studies in this subject.

The teachers did not mention multigrade teaching as one of their main interests for training. The reason seemed to be their lack of information about the very existence of such methodology. Multigrade teaching has neither been developed as a particular methodological strategy nor offered as part of teacher training. When I asked directly if they were interested in multigrade strategies, however, all answered affirmatively. Moreover, once presented with reading material addressing multigrade issues, the teachers were very enthusiastic about this new information.

The teachers' interests far exceeded the constraints of time and resources. Literacy was indeed an important issue for them, however, and they also demonstrated their interest in multigrade teaching. In working on these two topics, other interests could be brought into the process. In order to avoid further confusion about terminologies and models of teaching and learning, the need to work within the new pedagogical approach and to make explicit the links among it, multigrade strategies and literacy instruction became evident. Beyond the topic of the intervention, selecting the means for working together required a long process of negotiation that affected the final intervention.

1.1.2. Negotiating ways of working

Collaborative work, by definition, always requires negotiation among the participants. The process of negotiation also shapes the way in which such work is finally carried out.

One of the first questions to be raised concerned the nature of the "action" or intervention and my role as facilitator. In the years I have been involved in educational research, it seems that the dominant approach in teacher training suffers from many limitations in its possibility for fostering change in teachers' practices. Such training is sometimes so far removed from the teachers' experience, working conditions and real situations that they hardly put it into practice.

I therefore sought an approach that was not based in the role of an expert who teaches teachers what to do, but one whose point of departure was the teachers' practices and context, to encourage their active involvement. At the same time, I was interested in introducing new strategies to promote active learning and provide more opportunities for children to engage in a meaningful relation with literacy.

Literature in this area identifies three models for conducting action research (Kemmis, 1993; Elliot, 1987; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Walker, 1993, 1990; Grundy, 1987). The first model is **technical** action research, in which the outsider raises the issues to be addressed, sometimes to test the applicability of findings from studies conducted elsewhere. These studies may contribute to the improvement of some aspects of classroom practice or teachers' understandings. The disadvantage of this approach for teachers is that it might become based on the "expert's" knowledge rather than the participants' practices.

A second model is **practical** action research. Because its aim is to improve the participants' practices, it takes those practices as its point of departure and tests practical principles in relation to particular situations. This involves a process of self-reflection among the participants about their professional development (Elliot, 1987). The outside facilitator may mediate relationships among participants, helping them "to articulate their own concerns, plan strategic action, monitor the action and reflect on processes and consequences" (Kemmis, 1993:187). This model also aims to contribute to the improvement of practices, practitioners' understandings and the situations of practice.

The third model is **emancipatory** action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, 1993). In this approach, the participant group takes joint responsibility for action and reflection. The main concern is the development of explanations for the ways in which political and social forces in society ideologically distort teachers' self-understandings and practices (Elliot, 1987). It is emancipatory "because the group itself takes responsibility for its own emancipation from the dictates of irrational or unjust habits, customs,

precedents, coercion, or bureaucratic systematisation" (Kemmis, 1993: 187). The outsider participates and shares responsibility equally with other members.

There is considerable debate about different models of action research and the extent to which they allow the participants' critical involvement. Both practical and emancipatory approaches reject to a certain extent the positivistic approach of the technical model, in which theory is developed and validated independently of practice and then applied by the practitioner. These two approaches are interested in the development of theories from practice and the active involvement of practitioners in the process of self-reflection about practice. Nevertheless, practical and emancipatory approaches, which are rooted in different philosophical paradigms (i.e. hermeneutics and critical theory respectively), differ in the way they see this process of self-reflection.

The characterisation of, and debates about, action research approaches influenced the design of the intervention, although my own understanding was also developing throughout the process of doing the action research. The practical approach seemed more feasible in this case. It offered the possibility of taking practice as the point of departure and developing self-reflection about it. It would also allow a progressive engagement in critical reflection and the broader issues that influence teachers' practices (Elliot, 1987). The need for collaborative work, rather than delivery of technical issues, was also central. Although the emancipatory approach offered similar possibilities, it would have required a strong commitment from the teachers, willingness to work towards critical reflection, and more sustained work over time. Such conditions were not fulfilled in the context in which I worked. To choose this approach, therefore, could result in an imposition on the teachers.

The teachers had their own expectations about my role as facilitator, and they were closer to the technical approach. They wanted new information and new strategies with which to work. Because of my professional qualifications and access to other resources (libraries, information, materials), the teachers perceived me as a resource person and believed that my help could partially

overcome the lack of preparation and resources they felt. Thus their demands were more oriented towards technical training, whilst my expectations were of joint reflection.

With these demands, teachers were probably following the ways in which they were originally trained. These demands also express the kind of intervention teachers expect from an outsider with professional training. As Perez et al. (1998) point out, it may be difficult to avoid the expectation teachers have of an external researcher as having something to offer. Indeed, those expectations heavily influenced the decisions made and the ways in which the process was conducted.

Although confused at the beginning, I soon realised that the teachers had the right to demand what they feel to be their needs. They wanted to learn something new and improve their professional skills. At the same time, through such demands they probably were rejecting an extractive approach, one that serves the purposes of the researcher but not their practical concerns.

It was important for me to meet the teachers' expectations of acquiring new knowledge. I also wanted to present them with alternative strategies that had been successfully developed for working with multigrade classrooms. Nevertheless, I wanted to do it without renouncing the possibility of joint reflection. In retrospect, I can see that the teachers' expectations strongly influenced the design of the intervention. I felt the need to include new strategies that they might find interesting and useful for their classrooms. Nevertheless, taking their own practices as the point of departure, along with discussion and reflection upon how new strategies work, were also components of the intervention, which tried to engage them in a reflective process. In doing this, I also shared with them the results of my ethnographic research (in San Antonio and other villages), which supported the proposed intervention.

The teachers' expectations raise a point signalled by Perez et al. (1998) about how action research methodology is determined by the culture of the participants and their institutions. At first, I was sceptical because the tradition

of action research that influences my work was developed in a different context and based on a different teacher culture.[107] Peruvian teachers face an increasingly impoverished educational background (see Oliart, 1996; Montero et al, 2001) and a very centralised structure of educational administration, which discourages initiative and innovation among teachers and asks for a stricter delivery of a national curriculum.

At the same time, I assumed that action research could be a useful tool in developing teachers' professional skills in the concrete situations they face. They could gain knowledge and skills to facilitate their professional development through their own examination of practice and support for innovation. In hindsight, I see that my own expectations were overly ambitious because the intervention aimed to develop multiple skills in a short time and within a complex context.

1.1.3. Time

Time affected the design and implementation of the intervention. From the start, time was needed to understand how the teachers worked, what they did, what they wanted and needed, current literacy practices in school and what they might become. Time was needed to develop a relationship of trust with the teachers. Time was important for getting to know the children, how they interacted with the written word inside and outside the classroom, and how they interacted with each other and with the teachers. Time was necessary to meet the children's families and let them get to know me and the purposes of my research.

As in most studies, however, the time for conducting both ethnographic work and the later action research process was limited. I spent two and a half months in the school and the village before the intervention in order to inform its design and form.

Time restrictions were even heavier, and were sometimes frustrating, during the intervention. The initial target was to work with teachers during the first

[107] According to Elliot (1982, cit by Walker, 1994), action research, far from being imposed on teachers by academic researchers, was developed organically from an existing teacher culture receptive to innovation and notions of reflective practice.

half of the year (three months[108]). The actual time in which the teachers and I were engaged in collaborative work was only four weeks. This was due to the irregularity that characterises many multigrade schools (see Chapter 3). Table 7.1 clearly shows that this was true at the time of the intervention: there were 20 official school days in June, but the school remained closed for 12 of these days for various reasons. On only three days were all teachers in their classrooms, and during five days one or two of the teachers were absent. The situation improved in July, when all teachers were at school at least three days each week. One teacher was absent for two days, however, and the school was closed for four days.[109]

Time constraints on the intervention and its short duration must be taken in account in understanding the overall nature of such an intervention. In the end, it cannot be assessed through the changes it produced in the teachers' practices, since such a short period of time could hardly produce sustained and radical changes. Nevertheless, the process of working together revealed important points to take in account regarding strategies for teachers' professional development and in-service training. Moreover, it revealed new insights into teachers' practices and practical knowledge and even about teachers' literacy practices (discussed in Chapter 6).

[108] The first half of the year should be four months, but the school was closed the first month because of flooding.

[109] During the last week of July, there were no classes, but examinations and preparation for parades (for national Independence Day), followed by holidays until mid August.

Table 7.1. Calendar of school days worked in June-July 2001

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
May/June				
28	29	30 No class - Day of payment	31 No class - Day of payment	1 Holiday for elections
4 Holiday for elections	5 No [illegible] rs don't arrive	6 No class Teachers arrives with workbooks	7 Class in three classroom	8 Class in two classroom - Headteacher travel
11 No class - Village aniversary	12 No class - Village aniversary	13 No class - Village aniversary	14 No class - Holiday for anniversary	15 Class in two classroom - Headteacher travel
18 No class due to strong rain	19 Class in three classroom	20 Class in three classroom	21 No class - Day of payment	22 No class - Day of payment
25 No class - teachers don't arrive due to celebration of San Juan the day before	26 Class in one classroom - Headteacher and teacher F in a trainign course	27 Class in one classroom - Heaadteacher and teacher F in a trainign course	28 Class in two classroom - teacher F travel to get payment	29 National Holiday
July				
2 Class three classroom	3 Class three classroom	4 Class three classroom	5 No class - Celebration of teacher's day	6 National Holiday - Teacher's day
9 Class two classroom	10 Class two classroom	11 Class three classroom	12 Class three classroom	13 C ass th cla
16 Class three classroom	17 Class three classroom	18 Class three classroom	19 No class - Day of payment	20 No class - Day of payment

1.2. The design of the intervention

The final design of the intervention, which was affected by the factors mentioned above and nurtured by previous research at the school,[110] is presented briefly in this section. The general idea and question for the action research can be summarised as follows

> Teachers' literacy instructional strategies rely heavily on drill, practice and rote learning and underutilise resources such as books from the classroom library. How can we introduce literacy learning strategies to develop reading comprehension and writing production skills in the context of a multigrade classroom?

The general question has two main components. The first is related to the development of strategies for promoting reading comprehension and written production through active learning (a shift from rote learning). It seemed necessary here to take advantage of resources the school already had, such as the classroom library, and to make them functional tools for a multigrade setting.

The second component focused on multigrade classroom management. Teachers were active in creating different strategies for managing multigrade classrooms (see Chapter 6), doing so even under difficult conditions and without previous training to support this process.[111] It was important to acknowledge the teachers' strategies and reflect upon them, along with introducing new ones that could enrich the teachers' repertoire.

Both components and methodology were selected with the idea of taking teachers and the questions that are most relevant in their classrooms as the point of departure (Wood, 1988). I also took into account research findings from other studies about teacher change (Scharer, 1992; Guskey, 1986, 1989). They support the argument that teachers' most immediate need during implementation of a new approach is for information dealing specifically with

[110] Including classroom observation, teacher interviews and my own work as a teacher in multigrade classrooms in San Antonio.
[111] See Chapter 3 for the working conditions of multigrade teachers and the lack of training in multigrade methodology.

classroom practice. As the teachers were in a period of transition and accommodation between a traditional and a new approach, I tried to make explicit links between the new approach and the possibilities it offers for strategies dealing with literacy learning and multigrade classrooms, basing this on their context of practice. In doing this, my own work with children in classroom situations was extremely useful. I took charge of classrooms several times in the San Antonio school to replace an absent teacher.[112] This experience helped me better understand how children interact in classroom situations not only from the perspective of an observer, but also from that of the classroom teacher. I also realised the particular needs of some children, the potential of others and how they reacted to different teaching strategies. All these experiences were used to design the intervention and to provide the teachers with concrete examples from their own students.

The intervention was based on the national curriculum, its methodological orientations and competencies. Thus, teachers could find the intervention useful in developing their understandings about the new approach, rather than feeling that it presented new information unrelated to their current concerns.

Finally, trying to meet the teachers' expectations for new information about strategies in literacy instruction and multigrade methodology, I researched national and international literature on such issues. I spent school holidays doing this as part of a research team that was preparing a methodological proposal for multigrade schools for the Peruvian Ministry of Education. The proposal was based on both this literature review and previous research in Peruvian multigrade schools. The outcome was a set of nine modules addressing issues related to multigrade teaching methodology[113]. Each teacher received these modules at the beginning of the intervention and some were used during the intervention as reference material.

[112] These occasions include an entire week with grades 3 and 4, a session with grade 2, a session with grade 3, two sessions with grades 3 to 6, and one session with grades 5 and 6.
[113] Table of contents of the modules is presented in appendix 8. Modules were later published (Montero et al, 2002).

My participation in the Multigrade Teaching Project, an international research project, has also provided me the opportunity for first hand experiences in multigrade classroom situations in other countries (UK, Vietnam, Sri Lanka) and different strategies and policies for multigrade teaching in those countries. These experiences also informed my work. A summary of the topics addressed during the intervention is presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Work plan for action research

Week	Contents	Classroom activities
1	Introductory session. Presentation of the proposal to teachers, discussion and agreements about working methodology. Delivery of materials.	None
2	Start of working meetings. Organising the classroom. Review of Module 2. How do we organise the classroom environment? Learning corners. Making them a useful tool for multigrade classrooms. The classroom library and its possibilities in the multigrade classroom. Advantages of classroom libraries and books for children's learning. Designing the plan for a session introducing the classroom library in the classroom.	Knowing our books, building our library.
3	Discussion of classroom organisation strategies. How do we manage the multigrade classroom? What strategies do we use? Organising classroom layout for each activity. Reflection about the ways in which we use the space and how to improve it. Taking into account the use of the space for the activity. Identification of learning problems: reading and writing. Strategies for developing reading comprehension. Shared reading, reading groups, individual reading. Designing the plan for the shared reading session.	Using our library. Reading and making meaning. Shared reading.
4	Identification of learning problems: written production. Producing written texts. Strategies for stimulating and developing writing and written production among children. Reading: Module 8, Part I. Reading of images, oral expression, written expression. Different levels of activities according to different grades/ages/development.	Producing written texts. Create a short story.

1.3. Methodology

Each phase of the intervention followed a similar structure: a first meeting with all teachers to share current practices, identify a problem, discuss alternatives for addressing the problem, introduce new information (i.e. pertinent strategies) and plan a session using some of the strategies presented and

discussed. The teachers then conducted sessions with their classrooms, applying the general plan developed in the first session, with the particularities required by their own styles and their students' characteristics (each session was observed by the researcher). A third phase was another joint meeting to evaluate and discuss the application of the lesson developed and the problems and possibilities found in its practical application. Each phase was linked with the next, through the developing of strategies related to the ones already carried out. This work methodology tried to follow the steps of the action research approach: plan, act, observe the effects and reflect on these effects (Wood, 1988).

Although the strategies for working with each classroom and grade required adjustment to the particular characteristics of students of different ages, it was important that all teachers participate in the planning of each session. In this way, we could learn from each other and enrich the discussion. Three teachers (Maria, Penny, Olga) participated in the intervention.[114]

This methodology also follows assumptions for collaborative research as Wood (1988) points out: 1) Teachers work best on problems they identify themselves (which underlie the selection of topics); 2) teachers become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work; 3) teachers can help each other by working collaboratively (see also Stuart et al. 1997).

I also suggested the use of a personal journal (and provided teachers with a notebook) in which to record comments, impressions and all that emerged from the collective and individual work. This journal was for personal use, and its contents could be shared voluntarily. This strategy is usually recommended by action research literature to enhance the participants' self-reflective process (Wood, 1988; Elliot, 1991; Stuart and Kunje, 1998; Stuart et al, 1997).

Work meetings were tape-recorded with the consent of the teachers to facilitate systematisation. Notes were also taken in each session and teachers were observed in their classrooms during the planned session.

[114] Mario and Cesar were unexpectedly assigned to other schools at the time of the intervention. Penny and Maria came to replace them.

After an initial meeting with teachers to discuss and adjust the proposal for the intervention, its methodology and contents, I briefly informed the Communal Assembly about it. I later presented the proposal in greater detail to the Assembly of the Parents' Association[115] to seek their approval before beginning the intervention. In both cases the proposal was accepted. Especially at the Parents' Association meeting, parents expressed a positive attitude toward the intervention, interpreting it as part of a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the community in which both parties would gain with the process and outcomes of the research.

This reaction to the intervention shows that, contrary to the assumptions of some teachers and educational planners, rural parents are willing to accept innovations in their children's education if they are informed about the procedures and goals of such innovations. In addition, if they can assess the intentions of the intervention and the participants' backgrounds, they can provide informed and positive consent. The time spent in the village and the relationships established with parents proved to be a necessary and positive step for gaining such consent. Considering rural parents as valid interlocutors for pedagogical issues regarding their children's education is a practice that is just starting to emerge in Peruvian schools, although it is their right. The experience in San Antonio shows that when parents are involved from the very beginning, rather than ignored, they do take a positive, collaborative attitude towards educational innovation.

2. Exploring the process of action research

This section analyses the main findings of the action research process. First it examines both the importance and the limitations of sharing teaching experiences as a way of working collaboratively. It then explores the need and possibilities for a shift in attitudes towards classroom change and potentials. A section about evaluation provides some explanations for the weakness of this component in the entire process. The use of reading and writing during the process of action research is also analysed in relation to teacher training needs. Finally, some of the impacts of the intervention are discussed.

[115] All the parents with children in school.

2.1. Sharing experiences: the importance of teachers' knowledge

From the very first session, our meetings provided an important space for sharing teaching experiences. As Altieri (1997) points out, research has shown that teachers learn a great deal from each other. It was important to provide teachers with a space to talk together about pedagogical issues. They scarcely do it during school days, working alone with their classrooms and rarely asking one another for advice.[116] When visiting another school, teachers seldom talk about pedagogical issues, but tend to discuss social or administrative issues (i.e. news about common acquaintances, staff provision, administrative tasks). Therefore, providing a time and place for discussing pedagogical issues seemed useful for engaging teachers in a co-operative learning process.

To foster such engagement, sessions were designed to first discuss teachers' own strategies around different topics, before proposing a target for the lesson plan. In session 1, for example, using the module designed for classroom organisation,[117] we reviewed the material and related it to the teachers' own strategies for dealing with the points discussed. Each teacher was asked to describe how she dealt with a particular issue and contrast it with the module's recommendations and the other teachers' practices. This strategy was very successful, because it enabled the teachers to talk about their own ways of organising their classrooms, rather than having an outsider tell them how to organise them. In sharing their experiences, they could contrast different and similar methods, common points and new suggestions from the module. Moreover, this strategy led teachers to see themselves as active interlocutors with knowledge to share rather than a passive audience being told what to do, an essential point for the whole intervention. The focus on their actual classrooms also made it possible to discuss how to improve them with the resources at hand.

The teachers took advantage of the meetings to express their own ways of dealing with different situations. The atmosphere of the meetings was one of

[116] Although they do ask for advice from colleagues in their informal encounters in the city.
[117] Here I am referring to the modules prepared for the Ministry of Education, mentioned in section 2.1. See Appendix 8 for the contents of the module.

dialogue in which participants listened to one another, and all took part in the conversation. Departing from the discussion about different topics, they opened up other issues when providing examples of classroom situations or identifying particular problems they face. In doing this, the teachers revealed deeper knowledge of their students' individual characteristics than appeared in observation. Through their comments, I noticed that they identified children with particular needs for attention or with learning difficulties. I also came to know how they manage such situations (i.e. providing required attention or extra help to support children with difficulties). When they shared their experiences, other participants could also inform their strategies with those used by their colleagues.

Sharing teaching experiences during the meetings, therefore, was very important in the intervention. It showed that the teachers were willing to discuss the ways they manage their classrooms and the strategies they use. This discussion helped understand the teachers' practices, allowed them to identify problems and search for solutions, and enabled teachers to do further reflection. When examining new material (i.e. modules), teachers were positioned not as recipients but as dialogic interlocutors able to relate their practices to those of other teachers and the new information. This methodology allowed them to implement the strategies proposed not as externally imposed techniques, but in relation to their own practice.

The possibility of engaging in dialogue and using current practice as the point of departure, therefore, could foster change in teachers' attitudes. Perhaps if the dominant approach in teacher training involved this strategy, acknowledging the teachers' previous knowledge and making them active learners in their own training, they could make meaning of what active learning implies for children.

2.2. Few models at hand: the limitations of teachers' knowledge

Although using the teachers' practice as the point of departure was essential, it was clear during the process that engagement in dialogic conversation would be insufficient for fostering better practice. The problem lies in the

paucity of models for quality practice or even technical skills to which teachers can refer, a factor also signalled in studies conducted in other developing countries (Walker, 1994, 1993, 1990). The problem arises from many interrelated sources: the poor quality of pre-service teacher training, the failure of massive in-service teacher training to build upon teachers' experiences or challenge them effectively, the centralised management of educational bureaucracy that constrains rather than fosters innovation, and teachers' feelings of isolation and lack of resources to improve their practice.

Throughout our work, the teachers expressed the need for further knowledge for coping with the demands of their classrooms, for which they feel under-trained. Penny's words are illustrative:

> **Penny:** (I would like) some constructive critique, things for us to change, because we don't always do everything perfectly. We have our deficiencies, and we need some (advice) about how to do things from people like you who know a bit more about them.
> **Maria:** But this session had been interesting
> **Penny:** No, I mean, (...) in my case for example, what I need, what I lack, although we're not doing so badly, are we?
> **Penny:** Sometimes because we haven't had practice, sometimes it is a bit difficult for us ... because I want to do, but... "Should I do this? Or not? What if I do it badly?" sometimes I think like that, so I would like it if you could give me some ideas (LH2)

This excerpt clearly exemplifies several important points: first, the teachers' feelings of insecurity about their teaching and the need for external advice; second, the perception of the facilitator as someone who knows "a bit more" (an expert?); and finally, insecurity about trying new things and implementing initiatives, the fear of failure when doing something different, and the need for external ideas to improve their own practice.

Although the teachers participated actively in discussions, and this clearly helped position them as equal interlocutors with something to say, the importance of this background in the process cannot be minimised. The teachers' self-perception was marked by insecurity about their technical and practical knowledge. Accordingly, the perception of an external facilitator as an outsider who should provide new knowledge and whose position was different was also strong.

For this reason, as explained above, new strategies and alternative ways for managing their classrooms and their existing resources were offered to teachers. These were related to the teachers' specific context, however, showing not only that changes were possible but also why they were desirable.

Using the discussion about the active use of learning corners, for example, I introduced the use of the classroom library as a practical example of the pedagogical uses of learning corners. The advantages of classroom libraries pointed out by several studies were presented and exemplified. I also shared earlier research that I had conducted in rural schools about how teachers use (or do not use) their classroom libraries and the effects on students (Ames, 2001).[118] The teachers became more and more interested in the topic of classroom libraries and willing to try implementing them in their classrooms. Although they already had a classroom library for each grade and a reader plan to orient its implementation, the books had been stored for more than a year in the head teacher's office. The teachers and children seldom used them. The teachers' comments about the idea of putting the books in the classroom showed that they considered the idea a novelty. They indicated that it was the first time they had considered that possibility.

> **Maria**: I never had seen a library in a classroom, I mean, that the child can consult (books), have a dictionary at hand, (look up) any doubt ... Very interesting (...) I had never seen a library in a classroom. (LH 1).

After the discussion of this "new" idea, the teachers identified the benefits of putting a library in the classroom to make it accessible to children and useful for learning activities. The first lesson plan developed with the teachers, therefore, was to introduce the books to the children, implement a classroom library learning corner with the children's participation and make it a permanent space into the classroom.

The teachers revealed that they had never seen a classroom library in use. Rural schools have had so few books, if any, that they have been protected from the children and used mainly by teachers. The recent distribution of

[118] I also left a copy of the book presenting the results of the research for the school library.

books (since 1998) to all public schools contrasted with a previous experience of scarcity. Because training was seldom provided, teachers were not sure how to use these new resources (Ames, 2001).

It was necessary to present the teachers with new strategies for classroom practice to foster their professional development. As Walker (1993) points out, technical skills are important. Critical knowledge requires an underpinning of socially useful and relevant skills. This, however, does not mean that technical knowledge is enough. Critical reflection about practices must also be part of the process of teachers' development.

Indeed, as has been indicated, the teachers themselves recognised the need to improve their own practices with further knowledge. Chapter 6 showed how many teaching practices fail to engage children in meaningful activities with the written word, instead making their learning a rather repetitive and tortuous process. Gore and Zeichner (1995) point out that teacher' understandings sometimes also help solidify and justify teaching practices that are harmful to students. This was evident in a discussion about norms and physical punishment, which made me confront several dilemmas about my role and how to raise points for critical reflection upon teachers' practices.

In a discussion of how to handle children who misbehaved, teachers Penny and Olga talked about physical punishment, not only to correct bad behaviour but also to foster learning. Although she sometimes used physical punishment, Maria stressed other ways of encouraging collaborative behaviour (e.g. controlling them through competition and attention). Although I am completely opposed to punishment, I had several questions about how to address the issue: How should I make teachers aware of the harmful effects of this practice? How should I challenge its legitimacy?

In this episode, the limits of sharing experiences were clear. Although two teachers were confronted with other strategies by the third teacher, none of the three was clearly opposed to physical punishment. The conversation shifted to alternative strategies (e.g. special attention) and how they help

children behave, without the need to punish them. Nevertheless, I failed to challenge the very idea of punishment, trapped in my own dilemmas about how to do it without harming the teachers. My own need to acquire technical and practical knowledge (i.e. reflection on ethical issues) became apparent.[119]

2.3. Shifting responsibility: from blaming the students to looking for solutions

Another important finding during the process of action research was the need to shift teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding classroom problems. As explained in the previous chapter and pointed out by other studies (Montero et al, 2001, 2000; Ames, 1999), teachers tend to blame parents, students, and the conditions of the school itself for their lack of success in achieving learning goals. Allowing these issues to emerge through shared discussion, it was possible to begin a process of shifting attitudes. The teachers' claims were confronted with a new question that departed from their own identification of a problem, but moved in another direction. Rather than repeating that there were not enough materials to work with, the question became "what materials do we have and what can we do with them to improve our teaching?". Rather than saying again and again that the students don't learn, the question was directed towards what could be done to help them learn.

One way of answering the first question was the development of classroom library (session 1). It was a concrete example of resources the school already has but that were under-utilised. The why and how of working with such resources were addressed throughout all our meetings. Regarding the second question, there was a shift from identification of a problem (low achievement in reading and writing) to a search for a solution (teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension and writing production). It was an important move, since the mere identification of the problem often leads to attitudes of disinterest and frustration among teachers. It also serves as a tautological explanation for children's failure: children don't learn because they don't learn.

[119] The teachers apparently were aware of my position, because none used physical punishment in my presence, but children told me about occasions when it was used when I was not in classroom.

Finally, when facing learning problems, teachers often returned to the most familiar strategies : dictation and copying, drill and repetition. For example, Maria, who is one of the best-trained teachers, showed a preference for more active strategies.[120] But when she identified low literacy levels among her students, her response was to use more traditional strategies (i.e. dictation) rather than to question whether such strategies might be at the basis of the problem.

The issue is complex. Teachers rely not only on their professional training, but also on their own experience as students. As Walker (1991) points out, citing Sachs (1978), research suggests that teachers' school experience is the most significant influence on teaching practice and teacher behaviour (see also Fuenlabrada et al, 1996). As students, the teachers had experienced a process marked by "transmission of knowledge" through teacher talk, rote learning, drill and repetition, and even physical punishment. Through their five years of professional training, they had also been passive recipients of knowledge transmitted by educators. This training is characterised by rote learning rather than reflective engagement with educational theories and strategies, as a study in Peruvian teacher training colleges shows (Oliart, 1996). Over 16 years of such study the teachers internalised this behaviour, which constitutes the strongest model they have for addressing classroom situations. The extent to which one or two weeks of in-service teacher training per year can challenge such a model appears limited, especially if in-service training becomes a learning situation in which teachers are again treated as passive listeners who are told what to do.

It was necessary, therefore, to foster a different attitude among teachers, encouraging them to search for solutions rather than excuses, to try new strategies rather than relying on traditional ones. Moreover, the teachers needed to see themselves as active subjects searching for new solutions to the problems they identified, and not merely complaining about them. When the teachers brought up problems related to literacy learning, therefore, it was possible to introduce new strategies for addressing them. The session began with the teachers' concerns, engaged the teachers in a discussion about

[120] See Chapter 6

them, introduced strategies using concrete examples involved their own students and even placed the teachers themselves in the position of active learners when the same strategy proposed for working with children was applied with them.

The teachers started to become aware that there were things they could do to improve children's learning. Analysing how children make meaning of texts, how they can be supported in their search for meaning, and how teachers can capitalise on children' curiosity and will to discover such meanings stimulated the teachers to try new strategies with their students. Moreover, concrete examples from my own work with **their** students, not any abstract student, help them visualise the feasibility of these new strategies and overcome the fear of failure when trying new strategies.

The discussion of new strategies always referred particularly to multigrade classrooms, as this was the context in which the teachers worked. In introducing new strategies, therefore, the discussion focused not only on their advantages for learning in general, but their feasibility for multigrade classrooms and how to adapt each strategy to the particular demands of each classroom and grade or groups of grades.

The shift towards a search for solutions to problems faced was an important outcome of the action research process. The presence of a facilitator seemed necessary to promote such shift. Teachers often feel insecure about trying new strategies on their own, as they fear failure. While some will try, many lack the confidence to experiment with new strategies without external support. Regular support during the short time of the intervention was helpful for the teachers, as they realised that their attempts would be met with feedback and "new ideas," as Penny said. They also proposed continuing to experiment with strategies that were discussed in the sessions or the modules, but not tried because of time constraints. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine whether they will be able to continue without the support of a facilitator, since the intervention was too short to enhance a sustained practice over time. This process could be fostered through continued work that enables teachers to gain enough confidence and skills to innovate in their

practices. Here again, professional development appears as an essential factor in improving their teaching practices. Without technical and practical skills, teachers cannot feel confident enough to explore and innovate their own practices. Taking into account the legacy of their own school experience and professional training, which foster a passive model of learning, and the context of a centralised educational administration, it is understandable that teachers do not consider themselves capable of taking action to transform their own educational practices. Professional development requires much more work; this experience is only an exploration of one form that such a process could take.

2.4. Evaluation and self-reflection

Evaluation meetings were much shorter than planning meetings. This is a first indicator of the role evaluation played in the entire process. There was more interest in the acquisition of new knowledge and strategies than in self-reflection about how they worked. Self-evaluation is not easy, as I came to acknowledge when evaluating my own role as facilitator. At first, the teachers just made general comments about the implementation of the lesson plan (the most used phrase was, "It was nice"). Nevertheless, an important outcome observed even in the first evaluation meeting was that the teachers expressed in their own words the principles behind the activity and its importance.

> **Maria:** I think (the library) started well, and I think it will continue to be a good thing. It depends on how the teachers and students use the library, because it shouldn't just be on display —we should use it. It is useful for children. (...) They will be able to acquire much more knowledge. We need to help them get used to using the books, so they won't just sit on the shelf. We have to use them. (...) The children's response has been good. They like it. At the end, when they saw everything nice and orderly ... I know they will care for and use it. We have organise the books by areas, on a table. (...) It's important, a good initiative, to build this new library.

The account of the positive aspects of the library in the evaluation of the activity suggests a process of appropriation of new knowledge recently acquired through planning and implementation of the activity.

The second week, at least one teacher (Penny) engaged in a more critical reflection about her performance. That Penny was willing to reflect on her own action was important and showed the beginning of a process of self scrutiny. To develop such a process, which is essential for action research, more time was needed. The few weeks that we were able to work together were not enough to fully exploit a systematic practice of self-reflection. As facilitator, I also failed to foster such an attitude. I was more interested in directing the teachers' attention towards the reactions of their students, who were extremely receptive to all the innovations proposed and who engaged in each activity with enthusiasm and curiosity, in some cases producing unexpected outcomes (especially in writing production).

This emphasis on the children's response was caused by an attitude that is common among teachers: they frequently discard the possibility of new strategies with the excuse that rural children will not respond to them. During the intervention, I tried to help the teachers see what I have seen through my involvement with children: that they are extremely active, thoughtful, curious, and enthusiastic about new ways of working in the classroom. During planning sessions, I used several examples of children's participation in different events, but during evaluation meetings I especially emphasised the children's positive response to the teachers' innovations. It was certainly a way to dispel the myth of rural children as non-responsive to new methods of active learning. It was important for the teachers to feel that they could try active strategies and that their students would respond positively, to overcome the fear of failure. Nevertheless, my emphasis on directing attention to the children's reaction was counter-productive to the required emphasis on self-reflection by the teachers. Some degree of self-reflection was present, and the teachers also appropriated new information, producing their own accounts of the importance of strategies implemented. The necessary systematic reflection about the action carried out, however, was not fully achieved.

The systematic nature of the intervention was a struggle every week. Given the teachers' real interest during every planning session, it was surprising that every week the negotiation of time and attendance was as hard as at the very

beginning. Perhaps a more sustained intervention over time would help make meetings a regular practice. What the whole process of delays and negotiation seems to suggest is that teachers don't have the practice of systematic reflection about their own work. The training sessions they attend in the city are more like school: teachers gather in an institution for several hours, trainers explain contents and the teachers return to work. Because of the isolation of the schools and the lack of resources for supervision, there is no follow-up of the teachers' practices in implementing new contents received in training courses.

As a result, teachers do not experience a sequential and systematic process of support and reflection on their actions. The time they spent in the village during the week seemed to be a good opportunity to do this, but they had other activities (i.e. domestic duties, personal matters, leisure time). Meeting time competed with their daily activities.[121] Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the teachers' participation in the intervention was voluntary. The teachers therefore attended each meeting of their own volition, which also proved their interest in improving their practice.

Another issue identified in evaluation and planning meetings was a tendency towards consensus rather than debate among the teachers. Although they sometimes expressed different points of view, they tried not to be confrontational with their colleagues or with me. Discussion involved different ways of doing things but no direct criticism of other ways. Although this fosters an environment of dialogue, it could be a problem when issues need to be confronted (e.g. physical punishment). This points to the need for a facilitator as a kind of arbitrator for discussion. The delicate relationships among teachers as colleagues might make it difficult for them to engage in pedagogical discussions. There is a risk of being seen as "showing off" one's own knowledge or implying that fellow teachers have less preparation. Having

[121] Holding the meetings during classroom hours was out of question. Children already had a reduced number of hours and days of lessons, as Table 7.1. shows.

a facilitator helped overcome that risk, and all the teachers were encouraged to express their opinions.[122]

2.5. Reading and writing in action research

Despite the teachers' interest in reading materials provided to them, their desire to acquire new knowledge and the value they attributed to the readings, the teachers did not read the texts provided outside our joint meetings. When asked about their reasons, they invariably said they were not used to reading:

> **Patricia**: Have you read something of the modules?
> **Olga**: Each time I start to read I feel sleepy
> **Patricia**: So are they (the modules) too boring?
> **Olga**: No, it's not the modules, that's the way I am. (LH2)

The teachers showed that reading teaching materials was not an internalised practice. Indeed some research has shown that "rural teachers read little and abandon the application of formats, guides or manuals that require many hours to review them out of work time in classrooms and schools" (UNICEF, 2000: 7)

This scarce use of reading as part of their own professional development and to acquire new knowledge related to their teaching indicates a serious problem in teacher training and the educational system that has shaped their practices.

During our work together, the teachers showed they were much more able to appropriate new knowledge, skills and information through mixed modal means (a combination of oral, visual and written) and direct interaction. Their references to seeking advice from colleagues (see Chapter 6) also show their preference for oral communication and direct interaction when learning new things. This must be taken in account in designing effective in-service teacher training strategies.

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[122] Nevertheless, some teachers participated more than others, reflecting their security about making statements and their ability to understand the ideas being discussed.

Indeed, the assumptions underlying some educational policies and teacher training strategies do not acknowledge the teachers' own literacy practices. Several teachers' guides had been distributed with students' workbooks and classroom libraries, but assuming that teachers will change their practices immediately if they read them seems unrealistic. The most obvious example of the ineffectiveness of providing reading materials in isolation was the distribution of a "reader's plan," a guide for using the classroom library. The teachers never read it before our sessions. As a result, the classroom libraries remained unused and their purposes and advantages ignored.

This does not imply that reading should be abandoned as part of teacher training strategies. The teachers did read the modules when we reviewed them together as part of our sessions. They came to understand the contents, clarifying some points through discussion and linking this new information with their own practices. Because they kept the materials and knew their contents, they could go back to them for further information. This experience shows that providing printed materials alone is not enough, since teachers are not likely to engage spontaneously in meaningful reading of them. Nevertheless, shared reading, discussion and application through practice proved useful in engaging teachers in reading as part of their training.

The suggested methodology of keeping journals as a way of enhancing self-reflection also proved to be far removed from the teachers' own writing practices. As explained in Chapter 6, the teachers used the journals to write down new information presented and discussed during the session — information that was already written down. The teachers used writing to copy, rather than to express themselves, their impressions, thoughts or comments, showing a different writing practice than the one requested of them.

It is important to be careful in pointing out teachers' literacy practices, so as not to imply that their uses of literacy are less valuable than others. The fact that they did not write down their reflections does not mean they were not experiencing a process of reflection. They were indeed, as their oral interventions showed (see section 2.4). But they did not express it in writing.

As with reading, the particular characteristics of teachers' writing practices must be taken in account in their training. Again, this does not mean abandoning the use of writing for self-reflection or self-expression as part of the training process. It is necessary to take the teachers' own practices as the point of departure, however, and develop further literacy skills among teachers as part of their professional development.

2.6. Impacts of the intervention

Although the intervention was exploratory, it resulted in some observable impacts. More sustained work over time would be needed to achieve major changes in the teachers' practices. Nonetheless, this section discusses impacts that were observed after our joint work.

A first observable impact was the use of classroom library. As a result of the intervention, the library remained in each classroom for the rest of the year, giving children more open access. During subsequent visits to the school, it was observed that the library was part of the classroom and the children were much more familiar with the books. The children would go to the library spontaneously during their free moments and pick up different books. Tori (grade 4) would pick up a math workbook and fill in the exercises. Joshua, (grade 3) told me some riddles he had read in the classroom library books and later showed me the books and the pages where the riddles were. Many other examples like these and direct observation in the classrooms at the end of the year showed that the children did use the books and libraries during free moments. Frequent use of the libraries by teachers, however, was not observed at the end of the year. Still, the children's use of the libraries was an important change.

A second impact was more immediate: teachers become aware that their students were more capable than they had believed. The children's response to every session implemented was extremely positive, as they engaged in activities with enthusiasm and performed better than the teachers had expected. Not only did the children welcome the library books and use them intensively, their reading comprehension also improved when the teachers

used new strategies. The session designed for writing production worked extremely well in grades 5 and 6,[123] where children working in pairs produced 10 different, creative stories based on the same picture. The same children who "don't know how to write when you ask them" created funny, coherent stories when given the opportunity. It will undoubtedly take more than a single episode to change the teachers' view of the children, but with small steps a vision that emphasises their limitations could give way to one focusing in their potential. As an outcome of the intervention, at least some steps were taken in this direction.

A third impact was related to the possibility of change in the multigrade classrooms. Some teachers consider full implementation of the educational reform to be too difficult for multigrade classrooms and abandon efforts to try it. With the intervention, new strategies were presented in connection with the particular context the teachers face, their own concerns and their pupils' specific characteristics. When they tried these strategies, they realised they were feasible in their own classrooms. Indeed, the teachers continued using some of the strategies implemented during the intervention (for example, Penny continued using the new strategies for developing reading comprehension skills[124]). Thus the intervention promoted innovation in the teachers' practices and led to a new perception of the multigrade classroom as a space that could be improved, not one that was intrinsically bad. They became aware that active learning strategies could be applied in multigrade classrooms, not only in monograde ones.

3. Discussion: potential and limits of action research

The action research approach (or mix of approaches) used in this intervention demonstrates both potential and limitations as a tool for professional development. This final section discusses both aspects and the ways action research can be used as an alternative strategy for in-service training for multigrade teachers.

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[123] The teacher of grade 3 and 4 did not attend the planning session. In grades 1 and 2, children still cannot write properly.
[124] Observable in later classroom observations (in September and November).

3.1. An alternative form of in-service teacher training

The action research carried out in San Antonio's school was a collaborative effort that included planning, acting, observation of effects and reflection on these effects. It used the teachers' practices as its point of departure, allowing sharing, comparison and reflection upon them. Teachers were active interlocutors rather than passive recipients of new ways of working. Introduction of new strategies was related to the teachers' practices, concerns and context and supported with reading material and practical examples.

The methodology used in this approach involved constant interaction among the participants and regular exchange of ideas. Given the conditions of multigrade schools (isolation, dispersion, small staff), it is difficult to apply action research as part of massive, centralised in-service training. This strategy requires regular contact between participants and thorough knowledge of the context of practice. It fits better with a decentralised, contextualised approach to teacher training. Although in-service training in Peru has mainly been delivered using a centralised model, a new feature emerging in the reform offer possibilities of applying action research methodologies for teacher training: the school networks.

Operating in some parts of the country, the school networks group a small number of neighbouring schools. A new design for the operation of these networks, which are being formed throughout the country, considers them as units for collaborative work such as curriculum planning and sharing of educational resources. Ideally, each network will have as a resource person an educator who will provide support and monitoring to teachers in each school. In such a model, the action research applied in this study could be fruitfully used as a methodology for in-service training and educational innovation. Indeed, networks offer the possibility of more constant interaction among teachers, since schools are geographically close. The educational context in which the teachers work also share common characteristics within the network, so all participants share common knowledge about it. A resource person who can act as facilitator for a group of teachers would also constitute an advantage for this kind of approach.

Action research such as that explored in this study, therefore, could be used fruitfully to improve teaching and learning in multigrade schools. Nevertheless, there are also some problems with this approach that must be considered. The experience of this study indicates some of the potentials and limitations of action research as a teacher training strategy. These are analysed below.

3.2. The potentials

The main findings of the study clearly show the importance of using the teachers' practices as the point of departure. Through reflection on specific cases, reference and examples from their classrooms, teachers shared their knowledge and their practical classroom strategies. Although at first the facilitator raised some issues, they were later raised by the teachers themselves.

Not only did this strategy recognise teachers as valid interlocutors, it also enabled them to see themselves as active decision makers whose practical knowledge is valued and serves as the basis for new learning. It took advantage of the many and sometimes creative ways in which they manage a classroom context for which they have not been trained (i.e. multigrade). Sharing experiences also contributed to mutual learning among participants. This process demonstrated the teachers' willingness to discuss strategies they use to manage their classrooms, a necessary first step towards more critical reflection. It also provided insight into the teachers' practices and rationale, contributing to the overall research process.

Another aspect encountered during the intervention was the possibility that action research can lead to shifts in teachers' attitudes. From complaints about the limitations of multigrade classrooms, rural schools, students and parents, teachers moved towards a more pro-active attitude, searching for solutions to problems identified. Again, using their particular situations as the point of departure helps them try to test alternative strategies to improve children's learning and acknowledge the very possibility of innovation. The decontextualised strategies usually presented in in-service training are more likely to be received with scepticism by teachers. The contextualisation of new

teaching strategies is intrinsic to the process encouraged by action research. Its emphasis on testing practical principles in particular situations opens up possibilities for teachers to change and develop as well as for improvement in classroom practices.

Some observable impacts in classroom practice were identified as a result of the action research process. First, the classroom libraries stayed in the classrooms and children had access to them during the rest of the school year. Children showed an active use of this resource. Second, teachers developed a more positive view of their students, because they responded positively to every innovation proposed. Moreover, the children sometimes produced outcomes beyond the teachers' expectations. Third, the feasibility of innovation for improving learning in multigrade schools became more apparent for teachers. Strategies for active learning that they previously considered designed for urban and monograde contexts proved to be applicable for their own students. Finally, some strategies used during the intervention (use of the classroom library, strategies for reading comprehension) were found among the teachers' classroom practices long after the end of the intervention.

The intervention's impacts must be considered in relation to its short duration. Their very existence shows the potential of action research for improving classroom practices even in a short period of time. Nevertheless, it is evident that a more sustained intervention over time is necessary to foster major changes.

Finally, close work with teachers provided insight into their main ways of appropriating new information and building new knowledge. The role of teachers' own literacy practices in this process also emerged. Teachers were more responsive to direct interaction and multi-modal (oral, visual, written) ways of approaching new knowledge than to the exclusive use of written means. This is seldom acknowledged in educational policies and teacher training programs, but is extremely important for the improvement of their training.

The process of action research, then, proved to be a useful tool for both action and research. It opened up new ways of improving teaching practices, teachers' development and change in classroom practices, while providing insight into a range of issues relevant for research.

3.3. The limitations

Despite the positive features observed during the action research, constraints were also evident in several aspects.

A first constraint identified was the participants' limited knowledge. The need to inform participants' knowledge with new approaches and strategies to improve their professional skills, both technical and practical, emerged clearly from the experience. The constraints of the teachers' background and the culture created by the context of practice became apparent. From the teachers' initial expectations of the facilitator's role to their own views of themselves, the teachers demonstrated their awareness of the need for further professional development. Although they identified external aid as a source for this, the process suggests that external aid should be closely related to the particular situations teachers face. The process also fostered a self-critical reflection about the role of the facilitator and acknowledgement of the need for further development of skills and understandings to overcome the many dilemmas a facilitator faces when doing action research.

Secondly, the intervention showed that evaluation must be emphasised and encouraged in a context in which it is not a common practice. It was observed that teachers invested much more time, reflection and interest in planning than in evaluation. This partly indicates that teachers are more accustomed to receiving training than evaluating the effects of such training in their classrooms. They did reflect about those effects, however, and showed their understandings by appropriating in their own words the central ideas discussed. An insufficient emphasis by the facilitator on encouraging and developing evaluation was also identified, as the focus was shifted to recognition of the children's responses rather than the teachers' actions.

A third aspect is related to teachers' literacy practices. The scarce practice of reading to acquire new knowledge as a tool for learning was observed. Writing was used to record factual knowledge rather than as an aid for self-reflection and personal expression. These practices have serious implications for teaching (see Chapter 6). These findings again indicate shortcomings of the teachers' professional training. Development of a wider range of literacy practices and skills (if they are to do the same with their students) must be a priority in their training.

These limitations are closely related to the broader context of teachers' practice. Educational training and background, institutional constraints and administrative requirements are aspects that influence teachers' practices. It is not possible to overcome the limitations that this context implies for action research methodology and for innovation itself. Understanding of learning and teaching theories and their relation to practical situations need further development, as the teachers' educational background remains impoverished. This limits the kind and extent of reflection in which teachers can engage when doing action research. Technical and practical skills as well as theoretical knowledge are needed to exploit fully the potentials of the action research process.

A school context that is not open to innovation needs radical transformations if teachers are to engage in a process of testing and evaluation of changes introduced. Institutional constraints that dictate appropriate teacher behaviour, including the centrality of control and discipline, remain a major obstacle to fostering a democratic learning environment in the classroom.

Centralised educational administration also creates limitations. The implementation of a top-down reform has been conducted without involving teachers actively in improving their classroom practices. This strategy only fosters a passive attitude among teachers. The lack of support and monitoring also leaves teachers alone and makes them reluctant to introduce the changes proposed by the reform, as they sometimes consider these changes inappropriate for their particular classroom situations. Centralised administration leaves little room for initiatives from the teachers themselves,

as they must follow rigid regulations. Finally, the kind of literacy practices that bureaucratic administration promotes among teachers tends to develop scribe-type practices rather than the use of reading and writing for the teachers' own learning.

Because of these conditions, it is not easy to engage in action research with teachers. Many basic steps must be taken to develop a self-reflective process among teachers. The intervention also showed the need to provide the foundations for a search for innovation and improvement in classroom practices.

This does not mean that action research should be abandoned as a form of professional development for teachers. Because of the potentials it offers, it is worth exploring. But the limits imposed by the context itself must be considered and challenged. This implies an apparent contradiction: If teachers are to truly engage in such a process, their basic technical and practical skills must be developed. Technical and practical skills, however, are not enough to challenge the very conditions of the teachers' practice. A more critical approach will therefore be necessary to situate the teachers in the broader context that shapes their daily classroom practices.

This contradiction points back to the different approaches to action research. As explained in section 1.2, the approach selected for the intervention was the practical one, with strong influence from the technical approach, as a result of the teachers' demands and needs. In the end, it was difficult to assess whether the intervention carried out in San Antonio was more technical or practical. The line dividing these two approaches is not always clear in real situations, as Walker (1990) points out. Moreover, identifying the intervention with a particular ideal type may be less important than determining what is needed to improve the approach.

Although the focus on the classroom proved to be useful and offered many possibilities, it was too narrow to challenge the constraints of the teachers' broader context and deeper understandings. This was particularly observed with regard to the social context in which the teachers worked and their negative view of it (see Chapter 6). Focusing on the classroom was a good

starting point, but it failed to address the many interconnections among the teachers' practices, social context, negative view of parents and the family context, and the children's learning experiences outside school. Because the action research was conducted as part of ongoing research in different domains of the children's lives, the understanding of these interconnections was not complete during the intervention and was difficult to address. Nevertheless, the research process underscores the importance of the social context and its influence on teachers' conceptions, teaching and expectations of students. The reproduction of social hierarchies between teachers and parents because of the teachers' attitudes towards the social context is expressed in their low expectations and lack of efforts to provide the children with more than the basics. Although the intervention attempted to make teachers aware of the children's potential, wider belief and conceptions about the students' social "disadvantages" were not fully challenged. To do this, the action research process must take a more critical approach.

The wider context (social, educational, political) that restricts the development of more effective and democratic classroom practices must be explicitly addressed, since it shapes teachers' practices and attitudes. Although there might be things that teachers cannot change on their own (i.e. the centralised nature of educational administration) because they involve other actors and political decisions, they can change aspects of the wider context that shape their actions. Teachers are social beings, and their actions are influenced by social factors, such as gender stereotypes, ethnic or social class prejudices, regional social hierarchies, etc. Such factors constitute part of the wider context to which I am referring and shape teachers' actions. To the extent that teachers are active in the production and reproduction of these factors, they can also take an active part in transforming them. Action research that encourages teachers to reflect upon how these factors influence personal actions and interactions (with parents, students, colleagues) is necessary to challenge practices that are unjust and harmful to their students.

As some authors point out (Walker, 1990; Grundy, 1987; Gore and Zeichner; 1995), action research is not necessarily a critical approach. If action research is to be a tool for transformation, a conscious critical perspective is needed.

The complex, unequal context of Peruvian education suggests that such transformation is necessary for the development of a more democratic school and society. It is not enough to develop technical and practical skills and wait for better conditions for engaging in critical thinking about the broader social issues that affect educational situations. Rather, a critical approach goes hand in hand with the development of technical and practical knowledge. Ways of doing it must be explored and the particularities of the teachers' context and background addressed. This will not be easy, but it is vital if all children are to have equal opportunities for learning.

CHAPTER 8:

CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF LITERACY PRACTICES ACROSS HOME, COMMUNITY AND MULTIGRADE SCHOOL

Introduction

This chapter considers the three domains which have up to this point been addressed separately in order to identify the particular literacy practices in each. As noted in the first chapter, however, this analytical choice does not mean that each domain exists separately from the others. Not only do children physically move fluently between domains, there are continuities as well as discontinuities in aspects of the literacy practices between domains too.

This chapter has four purposes: firstly, to analyse the discontinuities between literacy practices from one domain to another; secondly, to identify similarities across domains; thirdly, to analyse how these similarities express influences from practices found at one domain to practices found in another or even the influence of larger structures (e.g. the state). Finally, it discusses the findings of the fieldwork in relation to the body of research that informs the study.

The first section discusses literature from NLS that focuses on discontinuities in literacy practices across different domains and the negative impacts of such discontinuities on children's educational experience. Discontinuities identified in the study are then presented and discussed.

The second section recognises similarities and mutual influences across domains and discusses them through two key issues. First, it highlights the importance of the wider context through a particular reference to the State, not only as the promoter of the school and its related literacy practices, but also as the promoter of particular literacy practices among villagers and teachers as part of the process of forming them as citizens and public servants, respectively. Second, it shows overlapping between home and school, discussing ways in which learning outcomes in the multigrade school could be improved by paying more attention to the potentials of learning practices at home.

The third section considers the San Antonio situation in relation to the NLS literature to explain not only discontinuities but also continuities across domains and to identify the positive aspects of differences. Finally, the last section addresses issues of power and poverty that affect learning in San Antonio and raises points to take into consideration for future research and educational policy.

1. Cultural mismatches between home-community and school: discontinuities and failure

The first research question of this study is how literacy practices differ among different domains in the life of rural children attending the San Antonio multigrade school. An increasing body of research in the past few decades has begun to address the multiple ways in which literacy is used by different social and cultural groups (cf. Chapter 1).

Some of these studies have focused on the mismatch between home and community literacy practices and those expected and valued in school (Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1986). These studies have contributed to the understanding of literacy learning not as an isolated activity, but as a social practice related to language uses and cultural aspects of the group to which the children belong. Moreover, these studies have helped show that the school is not a neutral objective arena (Heath, 1983), but an institution that values particular skills, language practices and types of knowledge (Heath, 1983; Street and Street, 1991; Michaels, 1986).

This approach has shown that children who belong to certain social groups ("middle class," "mainstream," "upper class") have been socialised in the practices valued by the school, whilst other children from different groups have not. This helps explain the failure that the latter groups experience when starting school. This conclusion is supported by the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), who highlight the role of school as an institution that validates certain forms of "cultural capital" and rejects others.

Other studies on the relationship between home-community and school (Henriot, 1994) have also examined the discontinuities between these

domains, showing the ways in which communities resist or accommodate themselves in relation to school requirements. Some of these early studies (Leacock, 1971; Rosenfeld, 1971) challenged the idea that children from urban ghettos suffered from substantive "cultural deprivation." On the contrary, school failure was related to the children's inadequate response to cultural expectations that are radically different from those in their own culture and to differential treatment by teachers.

As a whole, these studies have contributed in several ways to an understanding of literacy and schooling as situated in social, cultural and institutional frameworks. This has helped to overcome the tendency to "blame the victim" (Anyon, 1981) for his or her failure. The recognition that schools' values, learning styles and communication patterns are cultural constructions that are neither universal nor natural has been extremely important in overcoming prejudices about children from different cultural and social backgrounds. This acknowledgement poses a challenge for schools: to attend the particular characteristics of their pupils, to build upon their abilities and to provide new ones. The "cultural awareness" that these studies raise has made possible the emergence of programs that aim to minimise discontinuities and create continuity between home and school, especially through bilingual and multicultural projects for minority groups.

Strongly influenced by the findings of this body of research, this study paid attention to differences and discontinuities between domains. An overview of the Peruvian context in chapter 4 suggested that strong differences in literacy and learning between home-community and school were likely to appear. This was due not only to the diverse social and cultural contexts that characterise Peruvian society, but also to unequal access to literacy and schooling for different social groups throughout Peruvian history.

Existing research also indicates differences in learning and literacy practices among social groups. Studies of children's socialisation in Andean and poor urban areas indicate different child rearing practices, communication patterns and adult-children interaction (Anderson, 1986; Ortiz and Yamamoto, 1994; Maurial, 1993; Uccelli, 1996). Recent studies have also started to show

discontinuities between literacy practices in home-community and school (Aikman, 1999; Zavala, 2001). This study also found that learning styles and literacy practices in children's homes and community differ in several ways from those at school. The next section addresses these differences.

1.1. Community, home and school: discontinuities in children's experience

Discontinuities between domains in San Antonio are related to a) contextualisation of literacy practices, b) learning styles, and c) the expected role of children in relation to literacy in each domain.

The first discontinuity identified among different domains in children's lives is how literacy is related to its social context. Literacy practices in the school are decontextualised from their social, communicative and functional purposes. School literacy mainly serves the school's internal purposes and is rarely linked with children's experience beyond school. In fact the many uses that literacy has in the community are very closely related to the practical and social needs of daily life. In contrast to school literacy, literacy in the community has very clear and meaningful social, communicative and/or functional purposes.

Thus, when looking at the community, it was shown that literacy is intensively used to manage not only village's internal organisation, but also its relationships with external institutions (cf. Chapter 4). Villagers use literacy when approaching social services, participating in religious meetings, receiving further training and participating in commercial transactions. The purposes of different literacy events are clear for villagers and are related to their practical needs. The same is true at home, where literacy is used to organise the household, communicate with relatives, seek information, express affection and help children with schoolwork, as well as for recreational purposes (cf. Chapter 5).

By contrast, at school (Chapter 6), literacy is not linked with the children's daily life. Reading and writing take place in the form of repeated exercises that emphasise coding and decoding skills and the copying of written signs.

Despite the emphasis in the new curriculum on the communicative nature of literacy (cf. Chapter 3), it does not appear in teachers' classroom practices. In general, such practices seem not to recognise the multiple uses of literacy beyond school. When they do so, for example when producing written documents (e.g. letters, receipts) used in the community and at home, the emphasis is on the reproduction of given formats rather than on the appropriation of literacy by children to serve different communicative and social purposes.

Literacy therefore is presented as detached from the children's immediate context and serves mainly the purposes defined by the school's institutional procedures: to make children learn through practice and repetition, through the copying of models or isolated words, to keep them on task and to produce material records of their work, which in turn serves as a means of evaluation. Literacy learning is measured not by its practical application for communication but by exams measuring the ability to use decontextualised skills. At the same time, the school does not seem to offer children the possibility of engaging in literacy activities that reveal further uses of literacy, such as getting information, acquiring new knowledge or expressing themselves. Learning literacy appears as an end in itself rather than a mean for further learning or a tool for personal life, although teachers do believe that literacy serves these purposes. Their instructional strategies rely so heavily on the acquisition of certain technical skills, however, that they can scarcely relate literacy to its meanings and uses beyond school requirements.

Thus, on the one hand, children are exposed to a range of literacy events in the context of the community and home that are related to daily life activities and practical needs. Literacy has a sense and a purpose in the children's social life and they seek to build the meanings, forms and functions of the written word (see Chapter 5). On the other hand, the very process in which children engage to make sense of literacy is not recognised in school procedures that emphasise a rigid, decontextualised approach to the written word. The school is seen as the place to learn literacy, but in institutionally sanctioned ways that make this learning a mechanical task instead of enhancing a more meaningful relationship with the written word.

Context is also important in relation to learning in general. Children's learning experiences differ across domains, especially between home and school. At home, children engage in a progressive process of learning skills related to productive and domestic activities. The main methods used involve direct participation of children in the activity, practice and observation. Children have the support of adults and older children who carry out the activity with them, showing them how to do it. Through their active participation in the activity, children progressively develop the skills necessary to carry out it independently. Children get a feeling of achievement when doing these activities and show they are proud of the things they can do. Children also are aware of the purpose of these activities and how they contribute to their families' needs.

By contrast, in school children face another kind of learning. They learn to read and write through drill and repetition of 'facts' and written signs until they manage enough coding and decoding skills to copy and to write and read longer passages. Even at that point, however, opportunities to use the written word for purposes other than school activities are scarce. The children are expected to do the same activity at the same time, guided by explicit instructions from the teacher. They frequently face a feeling of failure, because teachers emphasise their mistakes, leading the children to doubt their own ability to learn.

There is a contrast, therefore, between children's learning experiences at school and in the family. They reveal not only different "contents," but also different ways of learning.

Finally, another perceived discontinuity among literacy practices across domains is the expectation of children's direct involvement in literacy activities in each domain. Literacy events in the community and at home are undertaken mainly by adults or teenagers. Children are rarely involved directly in those activities, with the exception of getting help for homework, an event clearly related to school. Thus, although children do participate indirectly in literacy events in the community and at home, they are neither expected nor encouraged to participate more directly. The school is seen as the place to

acquire literacy skills that children can use in later life. And the school involves children directly with literacy activities, requiring them to read and write extensively as part of their schoolwork.

The fact that parents see literacy as a skill primarily of use in adult life restricts the involvement of children in literacy events that serve social and practical needs. Nevertheless, children receive support at home with their school literacy learning through help with homework. Here, literacy events carried out with children at home mirror those frequently seen at school, as literacy for school is considered the main purpose of children's engagement with literacy.

Despite the contrast between children's direct and indirect involvement in literacy activities, the conception of literacy as an ability necessary for adult life is present not only among parents, but also among teachers.

Although teachers are interested in children's development of reading and writing skills so they can perform school activities and routines (e.g. writing down lessons, reading aloud), they stress that literacy will be helpful for children in the future, as adults (cf. Chapter 6). Literacy also enables children to advance through different levels of the school system towards higher education.

Teachers, however, do not recognise that literacy can be related to children's immediate interests, i.e. in their search for information, recreation, reflection or self-expression, or be a tool for their attempts to make sense of their world.[125] In contrast with the value placed on literacy for the future, beyond school needs, little importance is placed on it for children's present life. This striking similarity between parents' and teachers' conceptions is related to the their uses of literacy. It also underscores the existence of similarities across domains, which must be taken in account along with mismatches. The next section turns in that direction.

[125] Although these uses of literacy are demanded by the National Curriculum.

2. Continuities across domains

Despite contrasts between home-community and school practices, research also shows striking similarities across domains that suggest overlapping and mutual influences among them. Literacy practices and learning styles interact in a much more complex way across domains than is apparent at first glance. Other agencies (such as the State) appear to have a strong influence in fostering and shaping similar literacy practices among both teachers and villagers. The school strongly shapes at least one literacy practice at home (e.g. homework) introducing school-type interaction models in mother-child relationships. It also advocates (and gets) particular parental behaviours modelled by what the school considers appropriate support for children's learning. Parents also seek the continuity of practices in which they were socialised as students themselves. Finally, children use some of their own learning experiences at home to cope with school requirements. All of these situations are explored below.

2.1. A relation with the State: villagers' and teachers' literacy practices

Chapter 4 investigated the many uses of literacy in the community. It is clear that one important use of literacy for the villagers in San Antonio is as a tool for gaining status that enables them to relate to public institutions, the market and to other social groups both regionally and nationally. Here I will examine the relationship that villagers establish with public institutions, and through them with the State, and illustrate how this relationship shapes literacy practices among villagers and teachers alike.

As part of a community that constitutes a social and political entity, villagers engage in a relationship with the State mediated by written documents. They produce and use different kinds of documents (official letters, requests, minutes books, etc.) to guarantee the provision of basic services such as health, education and social programs provided by the State. At the individual level, villagers also use written documents as customers of public services, as producers who require permits for some productive activities and as citizens who need written documents to testify to their identity and defend their rights.

The importance of written documents in the relationship between Peruvian citizens and the State has been highlighted by some studies (Nugent, 1996; Lund, 2001). In her ethnography of bureaucratic spaces in Peru, Lund stresses that "obtaining and maintaining documents is an ongoing daily concern in which the State's routines and policies create subjects and regulate the social making of meaning in this most material textual way" (Lund, 2001: 3). Lund's emphasis on how bureaucratic space becomes crucial for transforming the collective values and subjective understandings of local populations is useful not only in understanding the relationship between the individual and the State, but also community literacy practices that link a group of villagers with the State. At both the individual and collective levels, there is a process in which the State creates particular kinds of citizens through the production, circulation and management of written documents.

The strongly paper-mediated relationship with the State and its various institutions and the ways in which literacy has been introduced and used throughout Peruvian history (see Chapter 4) help to understand why rural villagers' values with regard to literacy are so closely related to the exercising of citizenship (Ames, 2002). This may also help to understand why parents in San Antonio believe that literacy is important for their children's futures, since they know that as adults, their children will face many demands for literacy from the State.

This kind of relationship with the State also promotes the use of literacy in particular ways inside the community, for example, the production of formulaic documents, which is especially important for people who hold positions in local organisations. When villagers mention the importance of literacy for reaching positions of authority in the village, they are referring to a particular kind of literacy that deals with the production, understanding and management of certain types of documents. This kind of literacy appears highly valued among them. It is also a highly gendered use of literacy, since male adults hold most positions of authority and produce this kind of literacy (see Chapter 4).

This does not mean that villagers use literacy only in this way. Early chapters have shown other ways in which villagers appropriate literacy to serve internal needs at the collective or individual level (see Chapters 4 and 5). I focus on the relationship with the State as one strong influence that shapes literacy practices among villagers without denying their active appropriation of it for other, self-generated purposes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the role of the State and its bureaucracy in generating particular literacy practices among people. Its influence crosses domains and reinforces such practices in different ways.

Teachers as citizens are also involved in documenting their personal identity. As public servants, however, they also experience a paper-mediated relationship with (State) educational administration. When exploring teachers' literacy practices outside the classroom (see Chapter 6), it was observed that teachers must produce various written documents for educational administration (e.g. official letters, requests, reports, etc.). These documents follow given formats that teachers need to know and manage in order to perform their duties. This practice shapes their identity within the educational bureaucracy.

These examples show that the relationships that different subjects, such as teachers or villagers, establish with State bureaucracy and its requirements have important consequences for the type of literacy practices they develop. These requirements contribute to shaping and promoting a particular kind of literacy, one which deals with the production of written documents in given formats. The written-mediated relationship with public institutions also contributes to the association of literacy with public spheres of life, as it is in those spheres that literacy becomes a necessary tool for fulfilling the requirements of one's position (as teacher, local representative, citizen, consumer or worker). Finally, through these associations, literacy appears as clearly important for adult life, when one must deal with such demands, whilst the purpose of literacy during childhood appears more related to school-related activities and future uses, such as those mentioned above.

Here, therefore, are similarities between some literacy practices among teachers and villagers, their related values and material forms. They appear strongly influenced by the action of a particular agent, the State. This also shows how the task of socialising citizens so they can fulfil their civil rights and obligations is pursued by the State in different ways. Even in rural settings such as San Antonio the State's influence is evident through the demands it makes on local organisations and public servants working in the community.

These demands foster not only particular literacy practices in each domain, but also a shared sense of the purpose of literacy in both domains. These practices in both the community and the school could reinforce each other. When valuing their learning at school, for example, villagers emphasise particular literacy skills that they need to face their duties as local representatives (see Chapter 4), such as the teaching of different types of documents (official letters, requests). Several lessons analysed in Chapter 6 showed this practice continue. In doing this, teachers recognise some local uses of literacy, providing elements for reproducing them. Nevertheless, they do not emphasise the relationship between lessons and the children's context or everyday experiences, but the memorising of the given format. This emphasis is much closer to the teachers' own literacy practices as part of a bureaucratic administration.

It is possible to see then, even in a geographically delimited local space, the strength and presence of wider structures and institutions, such as State bureaucracy. The State's presence is expressed in different relationships with villagers and teachers, local organisations and through educational administration. This demonstrates a complex, intertwined set of literacy practices inside and across domains.

Literacy practices are thus interactive and reciprocal across different domains and do not remain discrete and clearly differentiated. A similar kind of complex relationship can be identified between home and school.

2.2. Home and school

2.2.1. Influence of school on home: learned ways of learning

The most regular literacy event at home that involves deliberate joint action between parents and children is doing homework (cf. Chapter 5). In contrast with other literacy events at home which are informal, homework takes place at a particular time and in a particular place. Primarily, it is mothers who interact with their children through homework and this interaction follows a pattern usually found at school: the mother determines the child's activity, provides directions, expects the child to practice reading and writing, identifies errors, corrects them and provides answers to questions involved in the homework.

This interaction contrasts sharply with interaction between mothers and children in everyday activities, where the mother provides fewer explicit verbal directions, involves the child actively and corrects mistakes without verbal sanction. In helping with homework, the interaction between mother and child appears to mirror interaction between teachers and students at school. Mothers appear to apply their own experience as students and they follow the teachers' advice about ways of supporting their children's schooling (see Chapter 5).

By mirroring school practices and learning routines, both teachers and parents privilege this way of learning. Other ways of learning (i.e. the spontaneous participation of children in home literacy events) are not considered to foster literacy learning. As discussed in Chapter 5, however, research among children who successfully learn to read and write (Taylor, 1983) suggests that children's engagement with real literacy events is more important than direct teaching at home in enhancing their learning. This is confirmed by current trends in literacy learning (cf. Chapter 1) that emphasise how children build their understanding of the writing system based on the real uses it has in their immediate environment.

Without denying the importance of mothers' support for children in their learning, one can question whether the school-type interaction for helping with homework (fostered by teachers) is the best approach. Research leads us to

suggest that more opportunities for children to engage in real literacy events at home and in the community (with purposes beyond the acquisition of literacy itself, but rather its use for communicative purposes, real life situations, household organisation, etc.) would help children's literacy learning in general. Children's spontaneous attempts to make sense of the written word (see Chapter 5) seem to confirm this. The kind of support currently provided to children reinforces school routines and patterns of authority and hierarchy and socialises them into a particular kind of interaction with an adult (the teacher) in a given social situation (the classroom). But school routines are not synonymous with literacy learning. Moreover, many school routines can be ineffective in fostering children's literacy learning.

2.2.2. Can home influence school?

Ways of teaching and learning used and promoted by the school clearly influence some learning activities at home, as explained above. Is it possible that the opposite is also true? The experience with homework indicates that parents reinforce school practices. Parents expect that their children will receive homework and become worried when they do not. They share with teachers the belief that children learn through intensive practice. Parents have been educated through particular school practices and usually use these criteria to assess their children's schooling. This, in turn, could influence teachers, reinforcing such practices.

Teachers might feel compelled to satisfy parents' expectations by using more traditional strategies for teaching and learning literacy and demonstrating this through the homework they assign. A reciprocal influence between home and school seems to emerge although the influence that families can exert over school practices appears to be weaker than that of the school on the home. This is partly because school curricula and strategies are designed elsewhere, but also because power relationships between teachers and parents are not equal and their voices do not have the same impact on school practices.

There are also other ways in which the influence of the home, which could be useful for the learning process, is resisted by or invisible to educators. The

next section explores one such situation that is especially important for multigrade schools.

2.2.3. If home learning could influence school: the potentials of multi-age groups as learning experiences for multigrade students

Home and school engage in a relationship in which they mutually influence literacy practices. Nevertheless, the school, which presents its instructional strategies as the legitimised ways of learning, exercises the most powerful influence. Despite this, when the home is examined, it is evident that children are also socialised in other ways of learning (cf. Chapter 5). This section returns to such ways of learning to contrast them with school strategies and discuss their potentials for multigrade classrooms.

Section 1.1. explained that children engage in productive and domestic activities at home. Through active participation, children develop skills with the support of others (adults, older children) until they can carry out the activity independently. They learn in a context that provides a purposeful background for the activity and the necessary support to guide them until their learning is complete. More importantly, they learn in interaction with others in what I called mixed-age groups.

Thus, children go to school with a rich experience of learning from others and helping other children learn in the context of their daily life. Chapter 5 showed that children spent a great deal of time in mixed-age groups, which are used to establish relationships with older and younger children. In doing this, they develop a strong sense of responsibility and care for each other; share their knowledge and activities, and learn from one another.

Children also use this experience spontaneously to cope with schoolwork requirements (cf. Chapter 6). In the classroom, children interact with each other, regardless of grades and ages, to receive support for school tasks. Some teachers encourage mutual support more than others. More importantly, some teachers have more flexibility in their classrooms, facilitating this interaction among children.

Nevertheless, the pedagogical uses of children's interaction in the classroom and their ways of learning outside school are still scarcely developed. In contrast with their learning experiences at home, most schoolwork fails to involve children actively and purposefully in learning activities. School strategies are still heavily linked with direct teaching and constant use of drill and repetition. Children are supposed to carry out the same activity at the same time and (ideally) at the same pace. Mistakes are sanctioned rather than corrected through guided practice.

Even though the school is multigrade, separation of grades is still considered a principle for instructional organisation and linked with a view of literacy as a set of graded skills that have to be taught separately according to grade. Thus, teachers treat different groups either separately, giving them different activities, or as a single group, giving them the same activity. Although both of these strategies have advantages and disadvantages (see Chapter 6), both (as an exclusive strategy for working with children) operate under the model of a monograde classroom, with all children doing what corresponds to their grade. There is a lack of flexibility for mixing strategies and taking advantage of diversity in the classroom, although two teachers have taken some steps in this direction.

It seems that multigrade schools could gain if more attention were paid to other ways of learning observed at home. In both home and school, learning is progressive. At home, however, there is no strict physical separation between age groups, as there is at school. On the contrary, the interaction among age groups (adults-children or older-younger children) is what makes learning possible.

The experience of multi-age interaction that children bring to school is of special importance for multigrade classrooms. Teachers could use the children's experience in common activities in multi-age groups. Different groups could engage in different activities without the teacher's direction, but with his or her close support at some point. Older children could help younger children in their learning, reinforcing their own learning in the process.

Literature about multigrade teaching strategies has shown peer tutoring[126] to be a successful tool for multigrade classrooms (Collingwood, 1991; Thomas and Shaw, 1992). Even in the context of monograde classrooms, different learning paradigms (i.e. social constructivism) have emphasised that learning is not an isolated activity, but a social process in which interaction with other children as well as with the teacher helps individual learning.

The exploration of the home context shows that some skills can be learned through a more interactive relationship among children. This should also be taken into account in school, especially if there is a multi-age group in the same classroom. The school, however, seems to pay very little attention to ways of learning other than those institutionalised and legitimised by the school itself. Although this is characteristic of the school as institution, it is also reinforced by wider conceptions and views that teachers have about children's communities (cf. Chapter 6), and strongly related to social hierarchies in the region and the wider society.

Nevertheless, there is room for change, as this study shows. In the context of transition to new pedagogical strategies, teachers look for new ways of teaching and become engaged in improving their own practice when they have the opportunity to do so. The process of learning together discussed in Chapter 7 was not easy, nor did it show definite routes, but it offers new possibilities and challenges for teacher training and the improvement of teaching in multigrade classrooms.

The relationship among domains explored in this chapter shows not only discontinuities, but also connections. Both discontinuities and connections reveal different outcomes: On the one hand, they show the school's relative success in legitimising certain practices, and its continual denial of others. On the other hand, they show how, despite the school's attempts to validate certain practices, alternative ways of learning at home continue and provide further resources for children to meet the school's requirements. The next

[126] Although the concept of peer tutoring appears related to the collaborative work carried out by children of same age group, multigrade literature extends this concept to refer to activities carried out by children of different ages and grades.

section discusses an alternative framework for better understanding this complex panorama.

3. Beyond contrasts: blending, continuity and school success

The presence of continuities across domains make the emphasis on discontinuities discussed in section 1 insufficient to explain the findings of the study. Within the field of NLS, however, there is also a trend that emphasises the dynamic nature of literacy practices across domains and the potentials of diversity to enhance, rather than prevent, children's learning at school.

Thus, on the one hand, the cultural mismatch approach has lead to the rise of a more comprehensive awareness that school methods, contents and strategies have been designed without considering the culture of children from rural and indigenous groups. Instead of blaming children for failure and attributing it to innate deficiencies, this approach allowed the development of educational programs that look for connections between school curriculum and children's lives and culture. Special projects for education in rural areas and intercultural bilingual education have been carried out in Peru during the last three decades with this aim (Ames, 1990). This cultural awareness is also reflected in a more flexible approach to the curriculum, which officially recognises the need for diversification to respond to children's local context (see Chapter 3).

On the other hand, however, some studies criticise the emphasis on discontinuities as responsible for children's failure (Gregory and Williams, 2000; Moll, 1994). It is argued that this had led to policies based on the model of "cultural deprivation." According to this model, if children from different social and cultural groups lacked the abilities developed by their mainstream peers in their primary socialisation, it was considered necessary to provide them with such abilities. Most efforts to diminish discontinuities between children's home-community and school practices, therefore, concentrate on imposing school culture on the home.[127]

[127] For example, recent educational policy in the UK and USA (see Gregory and Williams, 2000).

Teachers in San Antonio demonstrate this view in their conceptions about the children's context, and it has prevented them from making more connections between children's learning and their immediate context, as it is considered a poor educational environment with nothing to offer. The school, therefore, is viewed as the only agent that can provide children with valid learning experiences, since parents cannot offer them at home.

In response to the cultural deprivation model, some studies emphasise not so much discontinuities between home-community and school as an obstacle to learning, but how they produce resources for successful learning experiences. Gregory and Williams (2000), for example, argue that access to contrasting literacies gives children strengths, not weaknesses. They highlight the wealth of literacy practices upon which children draw as they go about understanding the school's literacy demands. Their study, therefore, stresses the ways in which children have syncretised home and school learning, drawing upon one to inform and change the other and forming a dynamic whole. The work of Moll (1994) and Moll et al (1992) has developed the concept of "funds of knowledge" to highlight the many resources for learning that children from minority groups get in their homes and communities and how they constitute a rich background for working within the school.

These works recognise literacy as a social practice that differs in different domains of the child's life. Difference, however, is not equated with disadvantage. Difference is presented as resource and wealth. Moreover, connections between domains are presented as more fluid, with the potential for blending and mutual interaction. The presence of discontinuities is acknowledged, but so it is the possibility of bridging strategies between domains that contribute to literacy learning.

By recognising that San Antonio school is just one of a variety of social and cultural contexts in rural Peru, this research has made visible the varied ways in which literacy is used in this particular village and has investigated not deprivation but difference and elucidated the variety of literacy practices which exist. It looked for the meanings that literacy has in the life of rural villagers, and in doing this, it shows the complexity of such meanings. In looking at

literacy and learning as they are used in the home and community, the study highlights many features that show how children's social context offers them a rich range of experiences for building new knowledge and developing literacy skills. Nevertheless, the school and the teachers often fail to recognise these experiences and assume that children do not have the skills necessary for successful literacy learning, which must be provided by the school. Teachers advocate that parents help with homework and in doing so follow particular behaviours that mirror school procedures to enhance children's learning, imposing school culture over the home.

Boundaries among domains, however, were found to be much more porous than expected. Children do use learning strategies at home when facing school requirements, such as seeking support from older children. The multigrade school allows them to interact with other children of different grades in the same classroom. These children usually are siblings or relatives, and children can get support from them for schoolwork just as they do in the out-of-school learning context. Children also translate their school experiences in their play at home with younger children, when playing school and when helping younger children with homework. In general, children use all the experiences they get in and outside school in relation to the written word to work out its meanings and functions. When given the opportunity, children use the community's rich oral tradition to produce texts and create their own stories (see Chapter 5).

The investigation of San Antonio shows that rural villagers and their children are not "deprived" of literacy. To say that rural areas lack functional uses of writing (Godenzzi, Flores and Ramírez, 2000) is an inaccuracy and it is necessary to ask what is being counted as literacy, and where is it being sought. By expanding conceptions and practices of literacy to activities and communication in rural homes and communities, educators can build on children's literacy learning from their strengths, not their weaknesses.

4. An unequal world: power, poverty and learning

Any study of literacy and learning must investigate the nature of power relations and power structures in which literacy is embedded both within and beyond the local context. This section returns to this complex relationship to highlight that despite the presence of a wealth of out of school experience which can be a resource for learning, there are also political factors that intervene and affect learning. These problems are related to the power and prestige that some forms of literacy and learning have over others and the poverty that affect the three domains studied and the actors in them. In discussing these problems, I also consider the way in which a local study of San Antonio can contribute to developing understandings in a broader context.

A frequent misunderstanding about NLS is related to its emphasis on local uses of literacy. This emphasis, it is argued, glorifies local literacies, which are not the most powerful or prestigious literacy in the society. Prioritising local literacies and local literacy learning, it might be argued that this could lead to the continued subordination of certain groups, as they do not acquire the most prestigious literacy, which allows other types of participation in the wider society (Brandt and Clinton, 2002).

The NLS, however, emphasise rather than deny the power dimensions of literacy, particularly one type of literacy. Basing work on local literacies that are not the most prestigious does not imply glorification of them or an attempt to confine members of local groups within their own uses of literacy. On the contrary, this approach uses the local as its point of departure to demonstrate the many uses of literacy in different social contexts, and show that the most prestigious literacy in a given society is arbitrarily (and not naturally) established through social, cultural, historical and political processes. Because one type of literacy is more valued, however, it represents a kind of key for opening new doors and spaces for those who can use it (e.g. to allow entrance to higher education institutions or a better position in job market).

Beginning with the local does not deny the possibility and the right that individuals from different social groups and cultural traditions have to acquire

the literacy uses and skills that are most valued in the wider society. On the contrary, this approach offers the possibility of identifying agency among those usually described as "deprived" of literacy and makes visible other uses of literacy that are not acknowledged because of their low social prestige. Having an interest in the development of a wider range of literacy practices and skills to offer everyone the tools to overcome subordinated positions, taking local uses as the point of departure aim not to limit but to strengthen their literacy learning process.

In the process of making visible local practices and "previous knowledge" (to phrase it in terms of new pedagogical approach), however, the study uncovers how difficult it is for teachers to recognise this. The subordinate position of the group studied (within social structures in the region and the country) increases this difficulty. The teachers hold a negative view of the children's social group, which emphasises poverty, the parents' low level of instruction and inadequate parental support in the educational process. In doing this, it hinders the recognition of experiences, resources, knowledge and skills that children do get from their homes and community. Instead, an effort is made to impose the ways that the school and the teachers consider more valid for fostering children's learning.

The school has the power to do this. It is valued as the legitimate place to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow more equal participation in the society (whether the school really provides them is a point to be discussed later). Nevertheless, if the school does not recognise learning styles and literacy practices in other domains as valid, and imposes only its own, much more is lost than gained.

Teachers must recognise the existence of this wealth of experiences to make full use of them and make them an effective resource, rather than a handicap, for children. In Peruvian schools, (as noted in chapter 3 and 6) difference appears to be equated with disadvantage. Difference could be an advantage, but for this to be so, it must be recognised in the school curriculum and procedures and, most of all, in everyday interaction in the classroom. Otherwise, the result is low expectations that lead teachers to make the

minimum effort and provide little more than a very restricted version of the curriculum.

The imposition of school learning styles and literacy practices could also lead to an impoverishment of children's experiences and resources for learning if their learning styles at home become marginal. This is particularly worrying in a context, such as San Antonio where the school itself is an impoverished learning environment. But the evidence from San Antonio has also shown that the home and community offer children resources for learning from each other, learning in a multi-age context, learning collaboratively and that this experience could be used in the multigrade school. Current efforts looking for innovation in the Peruvian school system encourage methodological strategies such as group work and collaborative projects that involve precisely the kinds of skills that children develop in their homes and communities. But if the school and the teacher assume that theirs is the only way that provides the desired outcomes, the different learning resources are lost.

As earlier chapters have shown, a wide variety of interactions at home go unnoticed by the school (e.g. oral tradition and narratives) but can also constitute resources for learning (i.e. to foster children's language development, communication styles and patterns) and provide a rich range of knowledge, skills and topics that children use when producing written texts (cf. Chapter 5).

Different literacy practices and learning strategies have different status and they also offer different skills, knowledge and resources but they are not mutually exclusive; it is necessary to recognise that a diversity of experiences offers much more than uniformity.

The monograde model has become the most prestigious for the instructional organisation of schooling (cf. Chapter 3) and the multigrade model risks being subject to the same structure and practices. The multigrade school, however, can offer an alternative way of organising instruction that could create a rich learning environment (Veenhman, 1995; Thomas and Shaw, 1992, Little, 1995; Miller, 1989). It offers diversity, a wider range of interaction among pupils of different ages, skills and grades, and the possibility of introducing a

more flexible approach to teaching and learning, based on self learning, peer tutoring and active methodologies rather than mechanical ones, as experiences such as *Escuela Nueva* (Colombia), *Cursos Comunitarios* (Mexico) and NEU (Guatemala) have shown.

The fact that the monograde model has become the dominant or "normal" model leaves multigrade schools with second-class status. Again, one should be aware that this hierarchy has been constructed through historical, political and social processes. The greater prestige of the monograde classroom leads teachers to reproduce monograde strategies that are not necessarily appropriate for multigrade classrooms. The tensions that teachers face, because of the influence of what is considered the "normal" school, makes it more difficult to realise the potential benefits of multigrade schools.

Differences between multigrade and monograde schools also stem from other conditions in which they operate. This leads to the second point of this discussion: poverty. In Peru, as in many countries, multigrade schools have fewer material resources, infrastructure, educational aids and basic services, and their teachers have less training. They are located in small, isolated villages with scarce facilities. Teachers, therefore, face additional problems. They have fewer resources and poorer living conditions than teachers in urban areas and often live in school accommodation separated from their families for long periods. Both factors produce dissatisfaction among teachers and affect their teaching in both material and attitudinal ways (cf. Chapter 3).

Comparisons between monograde and multigrade schools in Peru and the students learning achievements are therefore unfair. Teachers in urban monograde and rural multigrade schools not only face differences in organisational instruction, but also find themselves in very different situations in terms of resources, support and personal experience. Multigrade teachers need more resources, training and support, but receive less than their urban colleagues. It is not surprising, therefore, that the performance of students in Peruvian multigrade schools appears to be worse than that of monograde schools. Nevertheless, a simple causal association that equates instructional organisation of the school (multigrade) with failure is only partial and the many

other factors related to low achievement in multigrade schools should be also taken into consideration.

Poverty affects not only the multigrade schools, but also the other domains in children's lives. As the situation of San Antonio has demonstrated poverty can cause children to skip school or even drop out when the family needs their work. Poverty can limit the years a child spends in school if it involves costs that parents cannot afford. Poverty limits the kind and quantity of printed material available at home, because parents do not have the money to acquire it and it limits the additional learning materials in school because parents cannot contribute to improve the quality of the school learning environment.

The study also shows that literacy does not imply the end of poverty, as some optimistic literature (cf. Chapter 1) seems to suggest. Most people in San Antonio are literate, but they remain in poverty. The case of San Antonio underscores what has been signalled by other studies (Street, 1995; Kalman, 1998; Graff, 1987b), that illiteracy intersects with other social, political and economic factors to reinforce poverty, but is not the only cause.

This study has shown the wealth of literacy experiences in the lives of rural children in San Antonio, but it does not overlook the context of poverty and its material dimensions. The school system should not overlook these either. Educational policies oriented towards promoting equal access to education for all must pay attention to the lack of material resources that rural families and multigrade schools face because of their poverty. It is necessary to continue providing books and educational materials, supplementary aids for students' nutrition and health, and improvement of infrastructure in order to guarantee that all children have equal access to a quality education.

Although good quality learning and teaching materials are very important, they do not solve all problems related to literacy learning. This study has shown that literacy practices at school are very restricted. They not only neglect local uses of literacy, but for many students they also fail to provide the promised literacy skills which are presented as the "key" to opening up the possibility of change that parents want for their children. The multigrade

school that San Antonio's children attend offers a low-quality education not only because of lack of teaching and learning materials and poor physical conditions, but mainly because of pedagogical limitations, inadequate teacher training and support, insufficient awareness of children's characteristics, needs and potential, low expectations for students and a prejudiced view of the children's social context. It is not the sole responsibility of teachers to produce or change this situation. The educational system that trains teachers, supports (or fails to support) their teaching and develops policy on what is valued or not in terms of literacy learning is also responsible for the low learning outcomes of its schools.

CHAPTER 9:

CONCLUSIONS

This study has addressed the uses and meanings of literacy in three domains of rural children's lives: community, home and school. In doing so, it has tried to contribute to current understandings of literacy learning processes among children in rural areas, who mainly attend multigrade schools. Exploring the uses of literacy in different domains made it possible to identify not only discontinuities, but also continuities and similarities in literacy practices across domains and the influence of larger institutions in literacy practices in rural areas.

Taking as its point of departure a theoretical framework that considers literacy as a social practice, the study has looked for social and cultural meanings of literacy among rural villagers in an attempt to link the various experiences that children have with the written word in their social and school context. Throughout the study, children have been considered as active meaning makers in their encounter with literacy, in line with recent educational perspectives on literacy learning. Both the social and educational perspectives that frame the study emphasise the social nature of literacy and learning and stress the need to understand the social context in which children learn literacy.

The methodological strategy for pursuing this understanding has been an ethnographic approach based on long-term fieldwork and involving several related techniques, including participant observation, formal and informal interviews, a socio-demographic census, home visits and classroom observations. Collaborative work with teachers was carried out following an action research approach that was also informed by previously collected ethnographic information.

It should be noted that an ethnographic approach that takes the local as its departure point is able to situate local practices in the wider framework in which they are allocated. This study has considered the case study in a broader framework that situates it in a particular national, social, regional and institutional context, making connections with international and global trends.

The study shows how literacy practices in the village are not shaped only by villagers, but also by their relationships with the state; with other institutions such as school, church, the health centre, etc.; and with the market in their search for jobs and commercial trade. Taking the local as the point of departure does not mean examining only the local, but opens up the complexities of literacy in society through the ways in which it is lived and acted on by some of its participants.

This approach also takes in consideration the particular historical moment in the Peruvian school system, paying attention to the current pedagogical reform, as the institutional framework in which multigrade schools operate. The analysis of San Antonio has taken into account that the school system is currently characterised by a context of change and transition. In analysing the current reform in Peru, therefore, it has been noted that it offers several possibilities for improving teaching and learning strategies in multigrade schools. Its failure to recognize the particular needs of multigrade schools and teachers and provide suitable strategies for them, however, limits the full realisation of its potential.

One of the most salient features of the current reform in the Peruvian school system is the recognition of children's active role in their learning process and their previous knowledge as a starting point for building up new knowledge. This approach is consistent with the approach taken by this research in considering the children's social context as a place in which they experience the written word before and during their formal learning at school.

In examining the different domains of this social context, it has become evident that rural children are exposed to and become involved in, directly or indirectly, various kinds of literacy events. Despite the common belief that rural villages are non-literate environments, this research has shown that literacy does play an important role in the lives of rural villagers and their children. Moreover, this role is important not only in local terms, but also in the ways in which rural villagers relate to national society.

The analysis has shown the ways in which literacy is central in the organisation of community life. From internal arrangements to the

relationships that the community establishes with external institutions, literacy plays an ongoing role in community affairs. Therefore literacy is seen as a tool for personal participation in public life, but also as a collective resource to share with others when holding a position of authority. At both the collective and individual levels, villagers need literacy for a variety of purposes in their interaction with different institutions and agents, from accessing services to documenting their identity. Villagers therefore consider literacy to be an important tool for improving their status not only in their relationship with the State, its institutions or the market, but also with other social groups in the region, for negotiating a social position in the stratified structure that characterises the region and Peruvian society.

Despite the strong links between literacy and the wider Peruvian society and state, however, it is also used for a variety of purposes in the more intimate space of the home. Observation of some homes in San Antonio has shown that literacy is also present there, from visual traces to the management of the household's practical needs. Literacy is also used for personal communication, to express feelings, to get information and for entertainment. Because villagers take literacy seriously, however, as parents they approach literacy instruction in a formal way: They do homework with their children, mirroring in this activity the forms of literacy learning promoted by the school. Parents varied in the extent and kind of support that they provide to their children for literacy learning. They all place a high value on literacy acquisition, but their ways of providing support are influenced by their perceived role as parents, the cultural, material and educational resources they have, and teachers' demands. Parents use a variety of strategies to support children, from direct involvement to organising support from older siblings.

The home environment also provides children with other resources for literacy learning. The study has highlighted the rich oral tradition and language development shared at home, and different ways of learning for productive and domestic activities carried out in this context. Children show that they can build upon their varied experiences with oral and written language in their homes and community when trying to make sense of the functions and

purposes of the written word. Home also offers children a learning experience based on interaction within multi-age groups, involving them in purposeful activities in which they progressively develop their skills with the help of an older person (either adult or child), basing their learning on observation and practice.

Nevertheless, this feature, which could be very useful for teaching and learning strategies in multigrade classrooms, remains invisible to teachers, who rely on a teacher-centred approach to learning and use mechanical strategies to foster literacy learning. Indeed, when analysing the multigrade school, and despite the stress of the reform that aims to base literacy learning on children's previous knowledge and real communicative situations, teachers were found to take a very decontextualised approach to literacy teaching strategies. Literacy acquisition is strongly based on the mastery of technical skills, which are presented to children through bits of information and practised through drill and repetition. Copying and dictation are the most used strategies for fostering literacy learning. Reproduction of given formats receives more attention than self-production of writing. There are indeed differences among teachers. Some use more active strategies to involve children in more meaningful exercise with the written word. Nevertheless, the approach to literacy remains largely decontextualised from its context of use and the communicative purposes it has in real life situations. Moreover, uses of literacy in school remain school-related, with no attempt to link them to the children's activities or interests outside the classroom.

Teachers demonstrate different professional backgrounds, training experiences, attitudes towards multigrade classrooms, perceptions about what children must learn and conceptions about the literacy learning process. These factors appear interrelated and influence the ways in which teachers approach their teaching and manage a multigrade situation. Teachers situate themselves on a continuum between traditional and new approaches to teaching, recognising that despite some training, they still use traditional strategies and mix them with more active ones. Teachers' scarce use of the children's social and cultural context in their teaching seems to be related to the fact that they do not value this context. Teachers consider rural villages to

be deprived environments because of poverty and parents' lack of interest and resources, and this seems to explain some of their choices about instructional strategies and goals. Finally, the teachers' own literacy practices affect their instructional strategies; it has been observed that they have the kinds of skills that they seek to develop in their students, and lack others that, correspondingly, are not part of their classroom practice.

Despite the impoverished picture of the multigrade school that emerges from this account, teachers are also searching actively and creatively for strategies for improving children's learning. Despite limitations of resources, training and support, they have developed strategies for managing multigrade classrooms that are not far from strategies developed elsewhere. These strategies require complementary actions and flexibility to realise the full potential of their classrooms. Nevertheless, they show that teachers are actively involved in addressing an educational situation for which they were not trained.

Working collaboratively with teachers through an action research process showed that teachers are willing to improve their strategies, share their practices, acquire new knowledge and try innovations in their classrooms to solve practical problems. Providing support and orientation in this process proved to be important for the teachers, who are less likely to try innovations on their own because of their fear of failure. The action research revealed this approach offers many potentially positive features for fostering teachers' development, but there are also problems to be considered when working with it.

Through a detailed study of these three different domains in the life of rural children and the literacy practices that characterise them, it was possible to establish discontinuities and similarities across domains. Both discontinuities and similarities demonstrated the complexities of literacy practices across domains, how one can influence the other and how larger structures also can exert a powerful influence on literacy practices in different domains.

Despite discontinuities in the role of context in literacy and learning, different ways of learning at home and school and the expected role of children in literacy activities in different domains, there are several similarities across

domains. Some reflect the powerful influence of school on shaping literacy instructional strategies at home, for example. Others reveal the State's influence in shaping similar literacy practices among teachers and villagers in its attempt to form them as public servants and citizens. Finally, one can see that the reverse is also true, and that children use their experiences at home and in the community to face the requirements of multigrade classrooms and literacy learning. The continuities found across domains, therefore, reveal the active ways in which teachers, parents and children engage in literacy practices, whilst also revealing various factors that shape such involvement.

The diversity of literacy events and practices in the home, community and school shows the importance of literacy in each of these domains. It is not possible to consider any of them as being deprived of literacy. Moreover, this very diversity, which implies discontinuities and similarities, shows the many resources upon which children develop their understanding of literacy, since they are able to drawn on their experiences in one domain to face requirements in another. In this study, diversity emerges as a source of wealth of experiences rather than a handicap for rural children. To exploit such wealth, however, educators must have a greater awareness of these varied experiences in order to make full use of them, draw on them in formal literacy instruction at school and shift from the still-prevalent restrictive view of literacy towards one that acknowledges its essentially social nature.

The same process is necessary to realise the potential of multigrade classrooms. Home life in San Antonio has shown how multi-age groups constitute a space and a resource for learning. Current pedagogical trends, including those that orient the Peruvian educational reform, stress the essentially social nature of learning, in which interaction with others and diversity in the classroom enhance the learning process. Seen in this light multigrade classrooms with children of different grades learning together represents a potentially enriching experience. Nevertheless, if these schools are to be effective, it is necessary to break with the notion of disadvantage and provide teachers and schools with resources, training and support. It is also necessary to recognise the social and communicative nature of literacy to break down conceptions that retain a technical and graded delivery of skills to

students, instead of engaging them in a meaningful interaction with the written word. Children do try to engage with literacy in this very sense with all the resources they have at hand. Multigrade schools and teachers can draw upon such resources to develop literacy learning and offer children more enriching and better ways of facing the world, not only in the future, but also in their present life. To do this, teachers also need to realise the potential of learning experiences and literacy practices at the home and community and bring them into the classroom, to enhance the effectiveness of literacy learning process.

These are not easy tasks, but they challenges all of us, educators, policy makers and social researchers, to approach literacy in all its complexity, variety and richness in order to respond fruitfully to individuals and groups interested in learning and using the written word.

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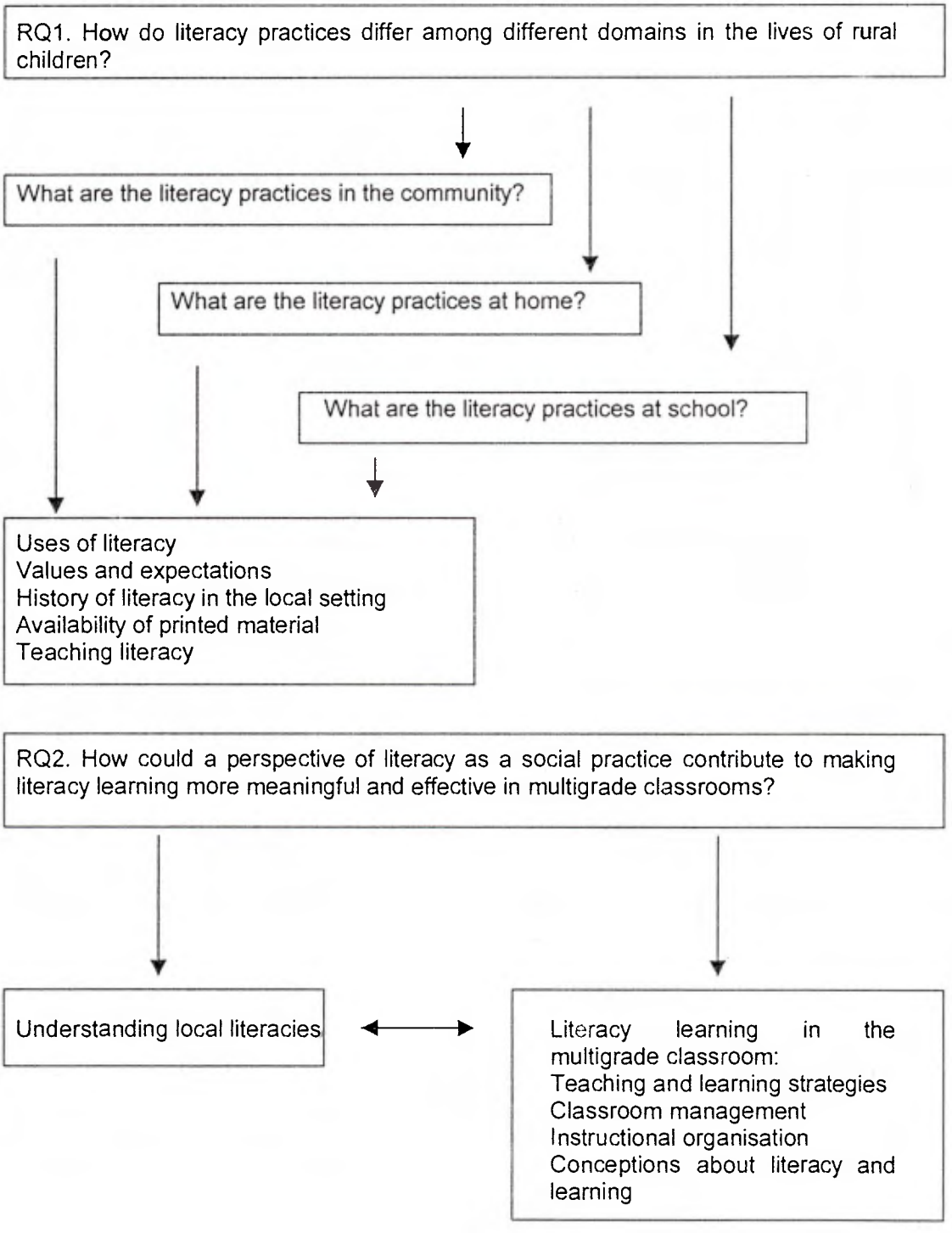
Appendix 1. (a) Scheme of research questions and sub-questions



Appendix 1. (b) Research sub-questions for each domain

Questions/Domains	*Community*	*Home*	*School*	Methodology
Uses of literacy				
• For what are reading and writing used?	X	X	X	Observation and interviews
• How are they used?	X	X	X	
• What is their purpose?	X	X	X	
• When are they used?	X	X	X	
• To which spheres or domains are they related? (for example: public/personal relationships)	X	X	X	
• To which language/s are they related?	X	X	X	
• Is the form of writing/reading related to oral forms/practices in the same domains?	X	X	X	
Values/Expectations				
• What is literacy used for?	X	X	X	Observation and Interviews
• What is the importance of literacy?				
• What literacy are we talking about when we talk about values and expectations?	X	X	X	
History of literacy in local setting				
• In which domain does literacy enter first? In what way? • (It must be related to a broader (national) context.)	X	X		Literature review, interviews
Availability of printed material				
• What kind of material?	X	X	X	Observation, and interviews or Question-naire/ Census
• In what number/quantity?	X	X	X	
• What kind of access is allowed to this material?	X	X	X	
• What printed material exists in the community/family/school?	X	X	X	
• How frequently is it "read"?	X	X	X	
• In what way it is read?	X	X	X	
Teaching literacy				
• Ways in which literacy is taught		X	X	Classroom/ home observation
• Classroom practices, pedagogical strategies			X	
• Conceptions about teaching literacy (readiness, disadvantaged background, etc.) • In general, how do teachers think about the teaching and learning process of literacy? How do these conceptions inform their practices?			X	Interviews
Multigrade situation				
• What kinds of strategies does the teacher use to manage the multigrade classroom?				Observation
• Are some positive features of MGT appreciated/used (peer tutoring, mixed ability groups, etc.)?			X	
Perceptions of MGT				
• How is the multigrade situation is viewed? (good/bad educational setting, why)			X	Interviews
Teachers' practices				
• How, when and for what do teachers use writing/reading outside the classroom?			X	Observation, interviews

Appendix 2. Fieldwork data

Table 2.1. Schools visited for small case studies

Schools	Nuevo San Antonio	Puerto Rico	Alfonso Ugarte	San Antonio Viejo	Puerto Aurora	Santa Lucía	Santa Elena	Santa Luz
# Teachers	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	2
# Students	70	29	15	51	25	23	30	40
Kind of settlement	Mestizo village	Mestizo village	Mestizo village	Mestizo village	Indigenous community	Indigenous community	Indigenous community	Indigenous community
Population	304	53	48	100	63	62	55	
Main Language	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Shipibo	Shipibo	Shipibo	Shipibo
Main activities	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture	Slash-and-burn agriculture	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting, gathering	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting, gathering	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting, gathering	Fishing, slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting, gathering
Main products	Fish, rice, beans, manioc	Fish, rice, beans, manioc	Rice, beans, corn, manioc	Fish, rice, beans, manioc	Fish, manioc, plantain	Fish, manioc, beans	Fish, manioc, beans	Fish, manioc, beans,
Basic services								
Water supply	From river	From river	From lake	From river	From lake	From river	From river	From river
Electricity	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Toilets	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Health centre	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 2.2. Issues covered in small case studies

Location of each school	Province, region, kind of settlement, etc.
Physical conditions of the school	Infrastructure, building, size, services, etc.
Physical organisation of the classroom	Arrangement of furniture, grade distribution, etc.
Educational materials available in the classroom and their use	Textbooks, workbooks, teaching aids, etc.
Teacher-pupil interaction	Teaching style, strategies of work, control and discipline, etc.
Pupil-pupil interaction	Work in groups or pairs, etc.
Characteristics of the teacher/pupils	Gender, age, ethnic origin, languages spoken, training, experience, etc.
Parent/school-teacher interaction	(If observable)

Table 2.3. List of special events recorded at school, home and community

Special events	Related with school	Related with home	Related with community
Visit to another school	x		
Birthday party at the school	x		
Birthday party at home		x	x
Party for upper grade students who finished primary education	x		
Party for upper grade students who finished secondary education	x		
Ceremony for end of school year (pre-school, primary and secondary levels)	x		
Communal Assembly			x
School Parents' Association meeting	x		x
Masses			x
Velada (religious festival)		x	x
Games (bingo)			x
Sports (volleyball, football)	x		x
Visit to another village for sports championship			
Trip to the city		x	x
Visit to relatives in the city		x	
Visit to the health centre		x	x
Visit to the cemetery			x
Rituals marking All Saints Day		x	x
Visit to gardens (*chacra*)		x	
Visit to the fish market		x	x
Celebration of Saint John's Day (regional festival)		x	x
Party for sports club anniversary			x
Celebration of village anniversary	x		x
Celebration of teachers' day	x		
Harvest in the school garden	x		

Table 2.4. Criteria for the selection of families and number of cases

Criteria for selection of families	Number of cases
Type of family	
Nuclear	4
Extended	5
Adults in charge of children	
Parents	6
Grandparents	3
Family size	
Large (6 to 8 children)	3
Medium (2 to 4 children)	5
Small (1 child)	1
Socio-economic conditions[128]	
Slightly better	4
Slightly worse	5
Location of the household[129]	
Main street	6
Away from the main street	1
Away from the village centre	1
Parents' educational level	
Both parents have secondary education	2
One parent with secondary education and one with primary education	2
Both parents with primary education	4
One parent without schooling	1
Parents' age	
26 to 35 years old	3
36 to 45 years old	2
46 to 55 years old	2
Over 56	2

Criteria for selection of children	Number of cases
Gender[130]	
Male	8
Female	6
Child's place in the family	
Eldest	2
Middle	8
Youngest	4
Child's grade	
1st grade	2
2nd grade	4
3rd grade	2
4th grade	4
5th grade	5
6th grade	1

[128] Socio-economic conditions differ slightly among families, although all live in poverty. Some indicators register differences among families, however, such as housing construction (material used for roof and walls) and presence of electrical appliances (radio, TV, boat motor. See sketch of San Antonio village (p. 308) to check presence of media possession in each household).

[129] See sketch of San Antonio village (p. 308) to check households' distribution pattern.

[130] I first selected the homes of 5 girls and 5 boys, but the number of siblings also attending primary school, who were also considered in the study, slightly increased the number of boys (9) in relation to girls (6)

Table 2.5. General features of selected families

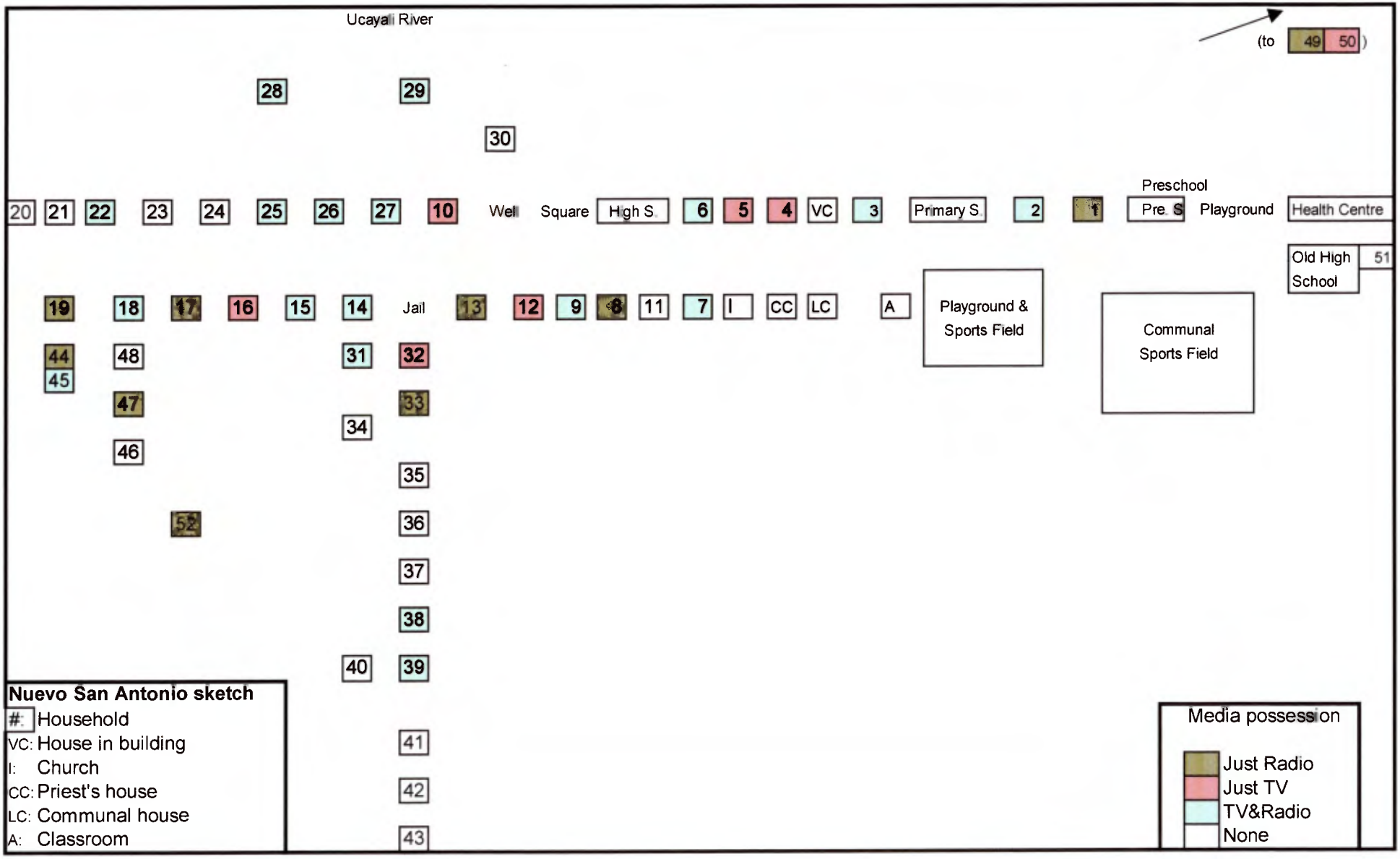
Children At School	Age	Grade	Family size (# members)	# of children	Family type	Parents' age group	Ed. Level Father (level-years)	Ed. Level Mother (level-years)	Grand parents [131]	S-E status [132]	Household location
Paula Lady	11 7	6 1	5	3	Nuclear	26-35.	Secondary –5	Secondary - 5		A	Main street
Joshua	7	3	5	3	Nuclear	26-35	Secondary– 3	Primary - 5		A	Main street
Mary	8	3	4	2	Nuclear	26-35	Secondary– 5	Secondary - 5		B	Main street
Beth Wilson Jr.	10 8	4 2	12	8	Extended	36-45	Primary – 5	Primary - 3		B	Far from village
Tori Jan	10 6	4 1	6	4	Nuclear	36-45	Primary – 5	Primary - 5		A	Main street
Luz Joseph	11 7	5 2	11	8	Extended	46-55	Primary – 5	Primary - 2		B	Secondary street
Mickey	8	2	10	4	Extended	46-55	Primary – 5	Primary - 3	X	B	Secondary street
Vivian Edu	7 10	2 5	11	6	Extended	Over 56	Primary – 2	None	X	B	Main street
Saul	10	5	5	1	Extended	Over 56	Primary – 5	Primary - 3	X	A	Main street

[131] Parents' children and/or grandchildren adopted (don't include grandchildren raise by sons or daughters at the household).
[132] A= slightly better socio-economic conditions. B= slightly worse socio-economic conditions. See also footnote 128.

Table 2.6. Number and duration of classroom observations per teacher

Teacher	Date	Time in class	No. of sessions	Total per teacher
Olga	21/08/00	2h 57m	2	**20**
	30/10/00	1h 23m	1	
	31/10/00	3h 2m	2	
	02/11/00	2h 39m	2	
	03/11/00	3h 2m	2	
	06/11/00	2h 23m	2	
	07/11/00	2h 46m	2	
	08/11/00	2h 49m	2	
	09/11/00	1h 58m	1	
	03/07/01	1h 54m	1	
	13/07/01	1h	1	
	18/07/01	54m	1	
	22/11/01	1h 31m	1	
Mario	24/08/01	4h	2	**9**
	13/11/00	3h 42m	2	
	14/11/00	2h 51m	2	
	15/11/00	3h 31	2	
	16/11/00	1h 33m	1	
Cesar	22/08/00	2h 51	2	**12**
	29/11/00	3h 26m	2	
	30/11/00	2h 40m	2	
	01/12/00	2h 49m	2	
	05/12/00	3h 04m	2	
	06/12/00	3h 22m	2	
Penny	20/06/01	3h 54m	2	**8**
	03/07/01	1h 9m	1	
	04/07/01	1h 47m	1	
	12/07/01	1h 49m	1	
	18/07/01	2h 22m	1	
	19/11/01	2h 04m	2	
Maria	02/07/01	1h 38m	1	**6**
	04/07/01	2h 03m	1	
	11/07/01	1h 47m	1	
	13/07/01	42m	1	
	20/11/01	1h 37m	1	
	21/11/01	1h 48m	1	
Total		**84h 47m**	**55**	**55**

Sketch of Nuevo San Antonio Village



Appendix 3. Oral and written communication competencies in the three cycles of primary education (Source: ECB, 2000, 2000a, 2000b)

	INTEGRAL COMMUNICATION' COMPETENCIES		
	1st CYCLE:	2nd CYCLE	3rd CYCLE
Oral communication	Communicates clearly and in a timely way needs, interests, opinions and experiences. Listens attentively, understanding the information received.	Communicates clearly and in a timely way needs, interests, opinions and experiences, taking into account different contexts and communicative situations of daily life as well as different interlocutors. Listens attentively, understanding the information received.	Communicates orally with clarity, precision, coherence and timeliness feelings, ideas, interests, opinions and experiences, taking in account different contexts and communicative situations as well as different interlocutors. Listens attentively and critically, understanding the information received.
Written communication: Reading	Reads different types of texts for information, to enrich knowledge and for enjoyment.	Reads texts critically to communicate in a functional way, for information and to broaden and deepen knowledge. Identifies ideas and important data and organises them into notes, summaries, charts, diagrams, etc. Reads different literary texts, narratives and poetry from local, national and universal literature. Enjoys doing this.	Critically reads informative and study texts, identifying ideas and important data, organising them into notes, summaries, outlines, charts or conceptual maps. Reads and enjoys literary texts, narratives and poetry from local, national and universal literature.
Written communication: Production	Produces different kinds of texts to communicate experiences, needs, interests and knowledge and to express imagination..	Produces different kind of texts to communicate in a functional way, records experiences, needs, interests, ideas and knowledge; creatively expresses own imaginary world, feelings and emotions. Autonomously produces texts for functional communication: letters, cards, signs, posters, programs, catalogues, instructions, descriptions, reports to communicate ideas, interests, experiences and feelings. Does this with attention to the clarity and structure of the text.	Autonomously produces texts for functional communication (expressive, instructional, informative, explicative, argumentative, and persuasive) to record, share and publish the results of surveys, research, and individual and group work. Produces literary texts that creatively express imaginary world, emotions and feelings. Presents these texts to a real public in performances, festivals, etc.

Appendix 4. Sketch of learning corners/written material in grade 1 and 2 classroom (August-December 2000)

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Role of students in cleaning the classroom</td><td rowspan="4">Desk</td><td rowspan="4">Classroom norms: Greeting teachers and adults; don't throw garbage on the floor, do homework, sweep the classroom before leaving, don't interrupt lesson hours, respect classmates inside and outside the classroom</td><td rowspan="4">What day is today?</td><td rowspan="4">A empty wall newspaper</td><td rowspan="4">(Logic? Mathematics?) geometrical figures and a set of numbers from 2000 to 2055.</td><td>Self cleaning corner: with drawings of soap, shampoo, tooth paste, a comb. There is one real mirror and the dates of the birthdays of the 16 children of grade 3.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Chalkboard</td><td>Two pots with water and a cup</td></tr>
<tr><td>A little shop: Bodega Sarelita</td></tr>
<tr><td>(Science and environment?): features of regional animals (turtle, parrot, monkey, "sachavaca," a sketch of parts of a plant (a corn plant), the words of the national anthem and the features of the national shield.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Door</td><td>(integral communication) "We have fun reading". There are 6 cuttings of magazine and newspaper headlines. Most are from a police force magazine. The cuttings talk about the fight against illegal drug trafficking, promotion of police personnel, anniversary of police health services, a new building for the anti-drug division, the celebration of the Justice Minister's birthday, and a police slogan: "Their job is to keep the citizens' trust"</td></tr>
<tr><td>(Religion) Images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus. The ten commandments.</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 5. The letter

The model used by the teacher

Nuevo San Antonio, October 30, 2000

Miss Mechi Torres Pezo

My often-remembered and unforgettable aunt:

I greet you very warmly, wishing you joy. I am here, much the same, along with my parents and other relatives. Aunt, I tell you that I am in third grade and getting good marks, maybe I will be there to tell you more about my studies and I will bring your package of tasty fish.

With these few words I say goodbye until soon. With a big hug and kisses, greetings for grandma.

Signed: Oscar Gonzales Torres

Nuevo San Antonio, October 30, 2000

Señora: Mechi Torres Pezo

Recordada e inolvidable tía:
Paso a saludarte muy cariñosamente deseándote alegría.
Yo por acá estoy sin novedad, juntamente con toda mis padres y demás familiares.
Tía te comunico que estoy cursando el tercer grado y tengo buenas notas, en esas estaré por ahí para contarte más de mis estudios y voy a llevar tu encomienda con ricos pescados.
Con estas cuantas palabras me despido hasta muy pronto.
Con fuerte abrazo y besos, saludos para la abuelita.
Firma Oscar Gonzales Torres

A child's letter

Miss patty I send you this letter because my parents have died I stayed with my grandparents and they keep me very well and my uncles help me I want you to come very soon because none of my aunts comes to my friends. It is so good we will play for a while.
Signed: Galy Jerson

Ceñorita paty te enbio esta carta porque mis padres a murio yo me quede con mis abuelitos y me mantienen muy bien y mis lios me ayudan qui ero que bengas muy pronto porque niunos demis tias bienen a mis amigos. es tan buenos nos ponemos unrato a jugar.
Firma Galy Jerson

Appendix 6. Excerpts from classroom observations

Excerpt 6.2. Grades 5 and 6

After some general instructions about activities for the day and the distribution of corrected exams, teacher Cesar writes on the chalkboard the date, the subject (integral communication) and the activity (the receipt).

The teacher begins by asking the children about the receipt: Have do you ever seen one? Do you know what it's like? The children do not answer directly and he continues asking if they know how to fill out a receipt. Some children begin to give indirect answers. Then Christian mentions receipts for recharging batteries, which is a very good example.[133]

The teacher uses that example briefly and asks for more. Then he asks what the receipt is for and when it is used. The children say they use receipts when they buy things. He also introduces its use with regard to monetary loans.

The questions continue, the children answer briefly and the teacher gives more examples. His speech clearly transmits the idea that commercial transactions must be supported by written documents. "As people say, paper speaks," the teacher says.

This dialogue about the receipt takes 14 minutes. Afterwards, the teacher writes the definition on the chalkboard and the children copy it in their notebooks. The next activity is to make a sample receipt. The teacher draws one on the chalkboard and the children answer when he asks some minor questions about amount of money, what will be bought and by whom.

When the model is finished, the children copy it in their notebooks. When they finish, the teacher makes another, using the same strategy of questions to fill in data. The children copy again. Finally the teacher assigns homework: to write two receipts for money and four for other items. The lesson ends here after one hour

[133] Radio and television sets operate using car batteries, which have to be charged from time to time. To do this, people gives the batteries to the pilot of the public boat, who transport them to the city. At the port, boys pick up the batteries and carry them to shops to be recharged. The shop attendant provides a receipt so the battery can be picked up the next day. The driver gives this receipt to the family that gave him the battery, and the next day another person can ask for the recharged battery. It is a very good example of local uses of literacy, and Christian provides a good example of the use of receipts. Teacher C knew enough about local life to recognise this.

Excerpt 6.3. Grades 5 and 6

The teacher writes "Dictation" on the chalkboard and asks two boys to go to the board.
The he changes his mind and says.

T: You will describe the visit to Pantoja. I apologise for the change."

He erases the chalkboard and writes "Description of the visit to Cabo Pantoja."

Children complain, as they had already written the previous title.
The boys at the chalkboard write one sentence each: I see them bathe in the river. I see them dance.

T: You write everything you observed (to Cris) and you write what activities we did (to Manu)

Ron: Teacher, we will do our own.
T: Write, of course (he notices other children were not writing). You can't wait until tomorrow!" (Children start to write)

Cris writes: I saw the *chaupi*, also I saw they were fishing

The teacher tells Cris to erase what he has written.

Manu writes, "I saw them dance. I saw they play vo... women"
The teacher corrects Manu, as the word for "play" was spelled incorrectly. Manu corrects the error. .

T: Let see, Cris. Erase that; it's not understandable.

Cris and Manu erase their sentences and go to their seats.
T: There is a lot to tell, a lot to say."

T: Didn't you see where we left from, what time we left, what we did? You have things to write; why don't you write anything?

The teacher starts to walk around the classroom. He comments that some children have nice handwriting. He tells all the children to write what they saw, giving the example of a herd of wild pigs crossing the path. He tells them to make things up and use many words. He gives the example of flirting with a girl: "Do you think you'll get her to fall in love with just two words? No, right? You must talk nicely, so you have to practice"

Excerpt 6.4. Grades 5 and 6

Three children take turns reading.
T: Have you understood something?
Students: Yes!!
A boy tries to tell something he understands, but the teacher interrupts him and ask another girl to read. After four turns, the reading ends and the teacher asks again:
T: Have you understood something?
Students: Yes!!
Some children try to say something about the reading, but the teacher interrupts again and says:
T: Let's see, to understand better, I will read.
After finishing, she asks again
T: Have you understood something?
Students: Yes, teacher!
T: Let see. Elias, what have you understood?
Elias answers, telling things about the end and the middle of the story. He had a problem with one word and she gives an unclear explanation of the word. Then she asks others what they understood from the beginning of the reading. She asks two girls, saying to them:
T: What have you understood? Even if it isn't everything, just a little bit that you understood.
The girls remain silent and she asks everyone:
T: Have you understood? How do you tell me you've understood?
She begins asking questions from the beginning of the story, and children answer all together. She asks more specific questions and everyone answers correctly. She reads the story again, but this time she stops from time to time to explain or ask questions and also to let the children complete a word in the sentence she is reading. Sometimes she asks questions and the children participate, and sometimes she reads and explains without seeking their participation. When she asks a specific question about an episode, the children answer together enthusiastically. After the reading, the teacher asks for a summary of the reading.

T: In your notebooks you will write a summary of the reading. ... I do not want just the beginning or the end, but everything

Excerpt 6.5. Grades 3 and 4

The teacher announces that she will read a story about "the cat family."

T: What do we need to do to understand the reading?
Students: Read it.
T: Yes, but in this case I will read, and what do you have to do?
-Students: Listen.
T: Good, but listen with a....
Students:...
T: you must listen with atten...

Students: tion
T: Yes, you must listen with attention.

The teacher reads a short story, repeating some phrases, explaining others, and explaining how in a difficult situation the good cat gets help and the bad cat must change.

T: Let's talk. What's the title of the story?
S: Minino.
S: Minina.
S: Minino and Minina.
S: "The Cat Family."
T: Good, "The Cat Family."

She asks about the characters, what they were like, what happened to the owner, how Minina gets help. She asks everyone to participate.

T: I want to listen to all of you.

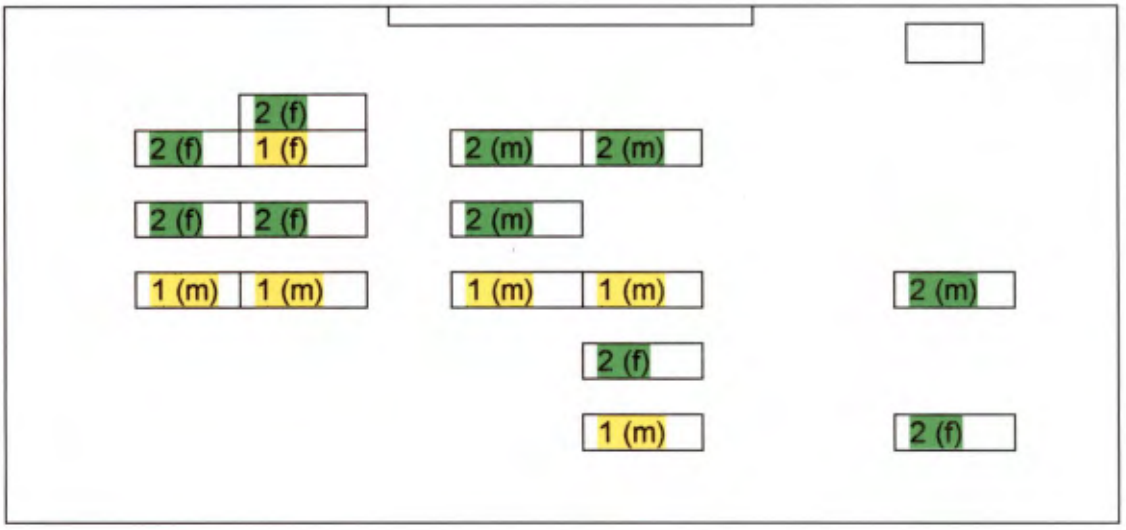
She asks what happened to Minino, who received more attention, why, how they would act, why the female cat received more attention, whether they are also good children, and what they have learned from the story.

Students: To be good
T: To be good, to share
Students: yes
T: To share with friends. What else?
Students:...
T: What else?
Students: To be very good
T: To be very good, to share with other people

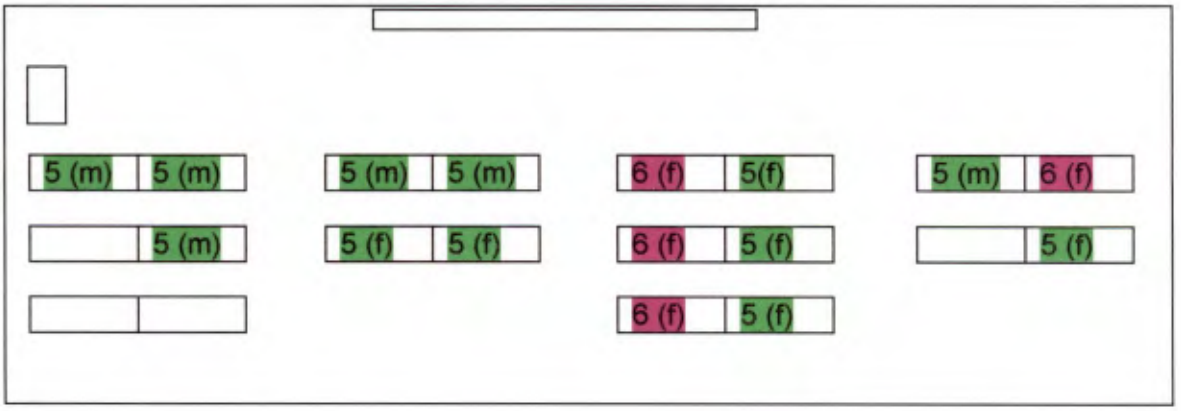
She gives an example of how they can share fruit or whatever they have.

Appendix 7. Sketches of students' distribution in classroom

Sketch 1. Students' distribution in classroom. Grades 1 and 2 (Olga).[1]

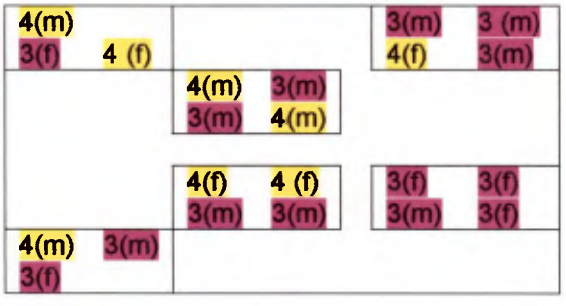


Sketch 2. Students' distribution in classroom. Grades 5 and 6 (Cesar)

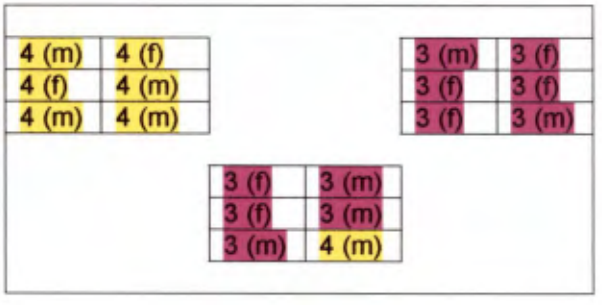


Sketch 3. Students' distribution in classroom. Grades 3 and 4.

a. Mario



b. Maria



[1] The number indicates the grade. The letter indicates gender, either female (f) or male (m).

Appendix 8. Modules for multigrade teaching. List of contents. [135]

Unit 1: The multigrade teaching strategy

1. Basic ideas for a multigrade teaching strategy
1.1. Understanding teaching
1.2. Understanding learning

2. Dynamics of interaction in the multigrade classroom
2.1. A network of relationships between teachers and students — the particularity of the multigrade classroom
2.2. How does the teacher work?
   a) Direct teaching
   b) Indirect teaching
2.3. How does the student work?
   a) Individual work
   b) Collaborative work in small groups
   c) Working with monitors (peer tutoring)

3. Multigrade teaching strategy
3.1. Simultaneous attention
3.2. Differentiated participation of students according to their characteristics
   - How to incorporate diversity into learning activities in the multigrade classroom
3.3. The teacher combines and alternates his or her ways of teaching
3.4. Students combine and alternate their ways of working

Unit 2: The educational space. Organisation and use

1. Basic conditions in the classroom
   1. Ventilation
   2. Lighting
   3. Cleanliness
   4. Furniture
      - What kind of furniture should be use?
      - How should we arrange the furniture?
      - How many chalkboards do we need?
      - What other things are necessary in the classroom?
   5. Pedagogical environment in the classroom. Some criteria to take into account
   a) When to arrange the classroom environment: Opportunity
   b) Not too much, not too little: Equilibrium
   c) Change according to working activities: Renovation
   d) Not merely decorative, but helpful for learning: Incorporating into the learning process
   6. Learning corners
      - What are they?
      - Utility in multigrade classrooms
      - How to organise learning corners?
      - What we put in learning corners?
      - How to care our learning corners

[135] Later published as Montero et al 2002.

- How to work with learning corners in the multigrade classroom.

7. Spatial distribution of students in the classroom
8. Other places with educational value

Unit 3. The atmosphere in the classroom

1. How to promote a positive atmosphere in the classroom
- Trust
- Mutual respect
- Affection

2. What makes it difficult to create a good atmosphere?
- teachers' prejudices about their students' ability to learn
- discipline misunderstood: the use of physical punishment and humiliation

3. How to keep order in the classroom?
- The need for clear norms
- How can we remember and practice the norms?

4. How to keep children motivated during the learning session
- How to give the directions for classroom activities

Unit 4. Educational materials

1. How can we use materials in a multigrade teaching strategy?
2. How can we use the materials we have in a non-graded way?
3. What helps us use the materials in the classroom?

3.1. Knowing the materials
3.2. Preparing ourselves to use them
3.3. Including the materials in out planning
3.4. Having the materials in the classroom

4. Creating materials

a) Learning sheets
b) Learning guides

5. Other resources we can use in our schools

Unit 5. Annual planning

1. What it is and how to do it
2. Making the Annual Time Table and school calendar
   - A suggested procedure
3. Information about the context, parents' demands and students' characteristics
4. Chart of capacities and attitudes: defining what my students will learn this year
   - A suggested procedure
5. Identification of didactic units with which to work this year

Unit 6. Didactic units for multigrade classrooms. Recommendations and criteria for designing them

1. Guidelines for designing didactic units for multigrade classrooms
2. The integration of curricular areas
3. 3. How to do evaluations in multigrade classrooms
    - Indicators for evaluation
    - Instruments

Unit 7. Organising the week and the day

1. Organising the time in the week
    - Practical advice for better use of weekly time
    - Suggested schedules
    - A reflection upon schedules
2. Organising the day

Unit 8. Language and communication in the multigrade classroom. Methodological orientations for integral communication in first and second language

Section 1

1. Oral communication
    - How do we develop children's formal oral communication?
    - What should we do when children make "mistakes"?
    - Developing competencies in oral communication

2. Reading

2.1. Before reading
2.2. Building meaning
2.3. Other reading strategies: reflection and comprehension
2.4. After reading: suggestions for activities and projects
2.5. Practical advice about reading

3. How to develop competencies in writing production

3.1. Sequence of text production
3.2. How to identify motivating themes to make students write
3.3. Writing

4. Reflection upon language

Section 2. Methodological guidelines for Integral communication: Spanish as a second language

1. Knowing the level of children's Spanish language skills
2. Managing strategies to make children to learn Spanish

2.1. Oral communication
2.2. Reading in Spanish
2.3. Writing in Spanish